

In Memorium

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A CHILDHOOD

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A Childhood

by

Hans Carossa

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IN the autumn of 1915 while we were in the lines near Becelaere the following pages were given to me by a comrade whom I had begged for something to read. I began reading them, but did not get through more than a third of the narrative and thought that it was asking much to expect me to enter into the world of a wildly fanciful boy while shells were exploding and wounded screaming on each side of me. Yet a kind of charm emanated from it ; I did not return it, and two years later in a rest-camp in Bukovina I fished it out again. By this time we had been through summer and winter campaigns on all the battle-fronts of Europe, but the external pressure of events, violent as it was, was beginning to lose its semblance of reality ; danger itself had shed its lustre, and not even the

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rout of an enormous force of the enemy which with our own eyes we witnessed as we marched through the burning sheaves of Galicia could quicken our pulses. But in the air there hovered an undefined hope for the human race. And this time, on a second reading, these simple confessions held me spellbound. That span of childhood which writers usually hasten over, when naughtiness is nature, when the hours are more real the more thickly they are woven with illusions, that completely integral span of the first ten years of life I now saw treated with the utmost seriousness, and yet retaining its quality of being only a beginning, a promise. When I met the author again I begged him to continue the book ; he half consented to do so, but immediately withdrew behind this remarkable statement : " The things one has loved and done in the first ten years of life one will always love and always do "—which was perhaps his way of saying that a continuation

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would be superfluous. I urged him no more, confronting him only with his own words in black and white—"We believe in the spirit, ever becoming, ever creating, ever manifesting itself. It slips into many cloaks, informing them with its own shape, so that it may grow for a while unnoticed. When the growth is accomplished, when the new stage is reached, it withdraws again from the outward husk of its last development, tossing that aside, and changes into the next."

CHAPTER I

FIRST PLEASURES

ON a Sunday in the winter of 1878 I was born at Königsdorf, in Upper Bavaria, where my father had settled down as a doctor some little time before. For seven years we lived there in a small house of two storeys ; the ground floor was reserved for patients and our rooms were upstairs. What was in them I can no longer recall, and yet I can remember clearly all that could be seen from the windows, as well as many a worthless thing which gave me my first sense of delight. There was a conical splinter of blue-grey granite glittering with flakes of mica. I treasured it more than any bought toy and made it the groundstone of my small life. Loveliest of all, however, was a large bead of clear blue glass which someone had hung at the window

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so that I could swing it from side to side as I pleased, quickly in short jerks or slowly and largely, and its motion seemed always to have a mysterious correspondence with whatever I desired and undertook.

Once my mother woke me in the night and carried me down into the streets. People were standing there in a crowd muttering to each other and staring at the sky. A hand turned my head in the direction they were gazing at, and a voice said : "Look at the comet !" It was such a splendid apparition that I could not help seeing it. A long tail of white fire stood out in the darkness of the night over the village. The patient staring of the waiting people, their almost scared whispering, the distant and solitary presence of that glittering bow of light, all this was stamped into my mind for ever, but took hold of me later in recollection far more strongly than at the time. I was barely three, not yet unfolded enough

First Pleasures

for fear or rapture ; I nestled in my mother's arm and felt through her the regular progress of the world.

The patients often had to wait for hours downstairs for my father, and in bad weather when I was kept indoors I ran to them for amusement. There was a certain young man with a very small chalk-white face and large blue eyes who came for a time, and him I was very fond of listening to although he could speak only in a husky and whispering voice. In the village he was looked upon as half-witted, but he had been in service in the city and told me about things the mere mention of which made my head reel, such as the Crystal Palace, the Arch of Triumph, the English Garden, and from time to time, the King himself. Ludwig the Second was everywhere at that time a subject for rumour. I had already heard from my mother about the winter garden which remained green all the year on the roof of his palace, about his castles and fortresses,

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and his mad journeys through the snowy Alpine nights. But these were not the mysteries that preoccupied the slow mind of the invalid ; it was something quite different which wrung admiration from him. He had seen the King in the Corpus Christi procession walking behind the sacred Host holding a large burning candle at arm's length. The superhuman endurance needed to keep the stiffly outstretched arm from sinking even once throughout two mortal hours was what had impressed him, and he kept on assuring me that no other man was capable of it, let somebody only try. The other patients smiled at the story, but I ran into my parents' bedroom, took one of the silver candlesticks from the table, held it out at arm's length, and paraded up and down before the wardrobe mirror, curious to see how long I could endure it, but I don't remember the result of the trial.

The poor fellow whose stories delighted me so much was suffering, as my father

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later explained, from a lingering disease of the larynx which disabled it so that he had to breathe through a silver tube inserted directly into his windpipe and kept firm with a neckband. This arrangement seemed to me altogether distinctive and enviable, and I listened with wonder to the metallic sound of the air sucking in and out, and gradually came to imagine that the man was lined inside with pure silver. I gave him no peace, but urged him continually to take long deep breaths, and with incredible patience the unfortunate youth indulged me, although the effort brought tears to his eyes, until my father finally discovered my inhuman game and forbade me to enter the lower rooms.

In late summer the moor between Königsdorf and Beuerberg was alive with adders, and my father was often called to people who had been bitten. My unthinking devotion to everything that ran or crawled may have worried him, for

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every now and then he took me along to one of his poison cases to let me see the consequences of being bitten, and sometimes took me driving with him across the moor so that I might be warned and learn at first hand from the actual sight of the snakes. If a viper ventured to show itself on the road as we passed by he used to snatch the whip from the coachman's hand and kill the reptile from his seat with two violent blows. I don't remember that he ever failed to strike the one fatal spot at the back of the neck. Then we would climb out ; he would make me approach it and try to impress on me the characteristic markings of the creature, the sight of which always gave me an extraordinary feeling. However strongly I had joined in whenever vipers were abused and execrated at home, as soon as I saw one of them laid out in the dust my attitude changed. Its bitten victims were forgotten, I saw only the dying snake gleaming for the last time with the imperative urge of

First Pleasures

its nature, and my father's deed seemed to me a mistaken piece of interference.

I used to ask him if God hadn't made the adders too, and he answered : " Of course, but they've gone over to the devil ! " Then if I asked him how he knew that that particular snake was poisonous, adding that perhaps it chanced to be an innocent one, he would lift the dead creature on his stick and come at me with it, saying : " We'll soon find out about that ! I believe it can still bite," and laugh grimly when I screamed and jumped aside.

The window with the big blue bead looked out over the street towards a hill topped by a church and a cemetery. The high grey towers of the church had a bulbous cupola of a reddish-brown colour yellowed with moss, and there were usually black crows circling round it cawing loudly. A flight of steps with a railing led up to the churchyard from the street below, and there was a wonderful

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coming and going of people up and down those broad steps the whole year round. Now it was a gaily attired woman carefully carrying in her arms something wrapped in white, now a man taking the same way with a green-garlanded figure by his side, and then again with tapers and incense and the ringing of bells a closed and flower-bedecked coffer would be hoisted up, followed by people singing and wailing. The last pleased me most of all. I used to sing, whistle, and yell as loud as I could, letting the bead swing as far as it would go.

CHAPTER II

THE TROUT

ONE of the children with whom I played was a ranger's daughter who liked nothing better than telling stories. She was older than I ; she was so tanned by the air and the sun that her enormous freckles looked like fair spots on her dark skin, and so the whole village nicknamed her " The Trout." The uncanny was her natural province ; wicked deeds, darkness, and earthquakes ; and she described them always as if she had been there herself. She was also an authority on the imminent end of the world ; she deciphered daily in the skies the most cogent signs of its coming, and often when we were up in an apple tree unthinkingly devouring the fruits of the earth she had us shuddering with gruesome delight over its destruction.

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Other people's remarks never put The Trout at a disadvantage. She had always some interpretation ready, and capped the wildest fable with one still wilder. Her only fault was that occasionally she sold her stories like any other commodity and refused to begin until everyone had given her a penny, a bit of silk ribbon, or something of the kind. She was not exactly good-natured to us younger children ; her own parents were hard on her and she was gratified to see others punished too, and spied eagerly on our misdeeds. Whenever she caught me misbehaving she ruthlessly reported it to my mother and recommended me for chastisement. But if she succeeded in getting me punished I could not remain vexed with her for long ; she never failed to make it up to me by a particularly fine story for which she waived her usual fee. For to my joy there were also good and kindly creatures with whom she was in secret alliance. In the caves of the lower hills, near the Bene-

The Trout

dictine Cliff, lived bright white stags with crystal antlers who spoke like human beings and treated her with lavish hospitality whenever she visited them. They licked her cheeks, comforted her when she had been whipped at home, brought her cakes and mead, clothes and shoes, and revealed to her the secrets which she afterwards passed on to us.

I implored her continually to take me with her only once to visit the wonderful stags. She promised to do so, but put me off from day to day, and came at last with wild sobs to tell me that hunters had tracked down and wounded the wise and lovely beasts, and that they had left their lair and gone far into the inaccessible mountains.

There were hours when I loved best to linger in the meadows among the cows with their tinkling bells, looking into their eyes, letting them blow upon me with their strong and gentle breath, and pressing myself against their warm heavy

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bodies at the risk of attack from their hoofs and horns. And yet the presence of beasts always plunged me into a vacant melancholy expectation such as I never felt among human beings. I wondered if other children felt the same, but I never discovered whether they did or not, and believed that I was the only one in the world to have this feeling. At such moments if thoughts of my father and mother, my lessons and prayers, ever came into my mind, I put them away as unbearably alien, as if under the spell of the animals I wanted to be nothing but an animal myself, and not to be drawn out of the innocent melancholy of animal life ; until suddenly I would spring up in a kind of alarm and run home, glad to emerge again into the everyday life of mankind.

If it is true, as poets say, that we carry within us from the dawn of time latent capacities which only our present form of life by ill chance keeps from development,

The Trout

I, like many others, was meant to have the gift of flying. Once a sudden certainty came to me that one could fly if one only beat the air long enough with one's arms at enormous speed ; I went into an open space and began to practise. But the law of gravity came upon me unawares in the shape of a great hound ; he was suspicious of my movements and bit me deeply in the arm ; weeks of convalescence forced me to inaction ; and my attempts at flying came to an end. Soon afterwards a second obsession ousted the first, and this one lasted longer. Once as I was sitting in the carriage beside my father driving over the Loisach Bridge it became quite clear to me that if I only kept on at a certain slant to the right and ran quickly enough I could cross the river on foot. All one had to do was to run unthinkingly at such lightning speed that one had no time to sink ; then one was bound to succeed. Slowly this idea took hold of me, and at last I confided it to *The Trout*. She

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said that was nothing new ; she herself had once run clean over the Starnbergersee from Seeshaupt to Ammerland without even wetting her skirt.

“ It’s not so easy as all that, of course,” she added with a thoughtful look. “ If you’re not born on a Sunday and don’t know the word you must keep saying while you run, the fastest legs aren’t of much use.”

With that she fell silent and stared fixedly into the distance. Delighted to know that I had fulfilled the first condition, of being born on a Sunday, I tried to coax the magic word out of her, and when I promised her the blue bead she confided it to me : it was “ Ogolúr ! Ogolúr ! ” She even gave me three hazel-nuts as well which I was to hold tight in my left hand as I ran ; that made Ogolúr more potent than ever.

Meanwhile Easter came, and in the preparation for that festival my yearning to run over the water subsided, but not

The Trout

for long. On Easter Monday after dinner my parents went off to Tölz, and as I was standing alone at the window the yellow mail coach came comfortably creaking down the hill. The postilion, gorgeous in blue and silver, began to blow an air on his horn, and longing pierced me so irresistibly that with a wildly beating heart I sprang into the street, waited till the horn-blower's head was turned in the other direction, and in a trice was ensconced behind the step, darkly resolved to go as far as the Loisach.

Church-goers came up the road and nodded to me, but paid no further attention ; probably they thought I would slip off again once the last houses were reached. But soon we had left the village behind and under the blue sky the well-known countryside quietly unfolded : rows of birch trees along the banks of the road where crowfoot and primroses were already in bloom, then the copper-brown moor with its stacks of peat, dwarfed pines, and

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distant streaks of snow, and behind everything the mountains veiled in light. The postilion blew air after air ; a cloud of white dust from the wheels hid me from passers-by ; I clutched my hazel-nuts from time to time and repeated the word *Ogolúr*.

Later we journeyed up a hill through brushwood ; here the wind blew cool and there was no dust. I saw an old man coming out of a by-path on to the main road ; his long beard was of a yellow-grey, his coat ragged, his walk stumbling ; he was lamenting aloud to himself and waving his arms wildly. I saw that he would have liked to overtake the mail-coach. Suddenly he caught sight of me and waved ; soon he was shaking both fists at me. I was alarmed, but noticed at the same time that the distance between us was steadily increasing, so I ventured to return his fist-shakings, which set him into such a rage that he cursed and threw a stone after me. The postilion, thinking

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all this was meant for him, shouted good-humouredly : “ Go and sleep off your liquor, you old sinner ! ” and drove rapidly on. That shout sobered me like a thunderclap. “ Sinner ” was a word the mere sound of which was frightful and solemn ; where it was heard the name of God was usually not far off, and I repented of having threatened the old man. If someone had told me at first that he was a sinner I would have taken care not to shake my fist at him. And suddenly it occurred to me that the countryside we were traversing now was quite strange to me ; I had never seen so many trees, so many big stones, and I began to be afraid. But we had just surmounted the hill and inexorably we rattled downwards, it took all my attention to keep my place on the step, and the terrible headlong journey ended unexpectedly before a large white building with a blue letter-box affixed to it. I could hear a sociable, subdued hum, the twang of a zither, snatches of song,

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and the noise of bowls rolling, and I found myself looking into an open inn garden where many people were sitting together at long tables with great grey mugs in front of them.

I slithered down feeling as sore as if I had been beaten, and was soon surrounded by gaping children and led up to some young mothers who smilingly asked the amazed postilion what grand passenger this was that he had brought. All the women were dressed in their holiday clothes with little round green or black hats girdled with silver cords and tassels, and round their strong necks chain necklaces with gold clasps : each had a prayer-book and a bunch of blue and yellow flowers in her hand. They asked me where I had come from, washed the dust off my face at the well, and made me comfortable. Then they set me beside their men at table, brought me Easter eggs, biscuits, and milk, and kept talking of the anxiety my mother must be feeling on my

The Trout

account. At last they decided simply to give me back to the postilion again on his return in two hours' time. The benches filled up with new guests, the zither twanged incessantly, some sang and others smacked their thighs with their hands ; there was great general good-humour, and everyone said that this was the sunniest, warmest Easter that had ever been known. And lo, the old sinner himself came into the garden, swept off his hat, and humbly went from table to table collecting alms. He now looked as reverend as God the Father, and I put up a passionate prayer that he might be merciful and not catch sight of me. But indeed he did not recognise me at all, and when I dropped one of my red eggs into his hat he thanked me with great courtesy.

After I had eaten my fill the children pulled me away. We agreed on a game of hide-and-seek, for which the large garden of trees with the many sheds and bushes abutting on it was well suited.

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Soon it was my turn to hide and be looked for. A long building like a barn seemed a likely place, and I went in. While I was groping round in its dusky spaciousness I saw something indescribably beautiful just vanishing through a hole in the floor further over, something that caught the light as it disappeared, a flowing of black and green and golden colour which was like nothing I had ever seen before. Eagerly I sprang after it and squeezed through the trap-door. This was not easy, my jacket tore, and buttons went popping, but finally I was standing in the open beside a gorgeous peacock which moved off slowly, and sedately let me admire it. But now the cries of my pursuers were quite near. There was nowhere to hide save among some reeds and bare bushes, but the bird's feathered magnificence drew me irresistibly after it, and I stood in indecision, when suddenly the glittering creature let out a shriek, sharp and ugly as a curse, and shocked and doubly

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startled I made a dive into the brushwood, trampling down withies and briers as I pushed incontinently forward, until I came to a gravelly flat where I stopped and listened. No sound from the children, no sound from the peacock ; a slight pulsation shook the ground, which was covered with large white-spotted leaves and reddish-blue flowerets something like primroses, and there in front of me through the stems of plants and bushes gleamed the wide water. I looked around me. Only a narrow strip of dry land divided me from pools and quags of all kinds full of half-drowned shrubs ; much refuse of brushwood and reeds had drifted here and was floating thick in small mats on the unquiet water, while delicate birds perched on them, rocking. Beyond these was the great river eddying in whirlpools. I should have liked to examine those pretty birds more closely, but my eyes were caught by something strange which hindered me from going forward. Uncanny

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yellowish-grey things were lying on the ground between the tall bushes ; they were halflike caterpillars, halflike cocoons, some of them slightly bent and others lying at full length, and—this made me shudder—not one was moving at all, they all lay as if dead. I was not in the habit of fearing other living creatures, neither beetles nor mice nor snakes, but I loathed the eyeless grubs. I knew them of old ; they lay or hung somewhere innocently enough and one took them up as confidently as if they were snail-shells, and then suddenly they shrank from one's touch, and repulsively proved themselves alive. These were what I now imagined lay before me, and the mere thought of treading on the ambiguous creatures, of even touching them with my toe, made my hair stand on end. I preferred to renounce further discoveries for the present, and contented myself with staring at the water from my gravel patch.

Then it was as if the river stopped flow-

The Trout

ing and I myself and the shore were rushing with terrific force into the unknown. At the same time my head felt somewhat giddy and I did not dare to turn my eyes away from the illusive distance. And yet I remembered too that I had wanted to run over the Loisach, and somewhere in space hovered the word Ogolúr. But on the other side of the river the sound of music approached, a concertina, it seemed to me, and a clear song of many voices, yet the singers could not be seen save for the gay flutter of a coloured frock or ribbon behind stems and tree-trunks ; it must have been a crowd of gaily dressed people. This broke the illusion, and while the music and the colour receded, objects of every kind came floating down the water : a chair, a rake, a baking board, and quite close, horribly real, a brownish animal with a blown-up white belly and naked gleaming teeth. This spectacle roused an infinite homesickness in me ; it seemed as if I should never get back to

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my mother ; and when I heard the anxious and almost angry shouts of the children seeking me it was like a deliverance. I echoed their cries with answering shouts, got entangled in the brush, and stirred up whole clouds of yellow dust which powdered over me from the shaken branches and made me cough. On looking up I discovered that this fragrant pollen emanated from those same yellowish-grey grubs that had so repulsively obstructed my progress ; they were growing in thick bunches here on the slender stems. I noted this information without stopping and fought my way out until at last, hot and happy, I reached the garden. The mail-coach was already waiting to depart. I took leave of the playmates I had only just found and invited them all to visit me in Königsdorf. The women wrapped a rug around me, set beside me a wicker basket full of gifts with the coloured eggs on top, and bade me give it to my mother to sweeten her reception of

The Trout

me. The postilion blew his horn, I settled myself comfortably beside him on the box, and the wheels creaked uphill.

When we got into Königsdorf by the last streaks of daylight with a full moon in the sky, The Trout was leaning against a fence. She scowled at me and lifted a threatening finger, shouting : “ You’re in for a fine time ! You’ll catch it for running away ! The cane’s laid out for you on the table ! ”

In a flash of unthinking inspiration I retorted by lifting the sumptuously laden basket with all the force of my two hands, and lying grandly : “ Ogolúr ! Ogolúr ! Much I care ! I’ve run over the Loisach. I’ve been with the white stags. I got mead and biscuits, and just look at the heaps of Easter eggs they’ve given me ! ”

My mother welcomed me not with punishments, but with many tears and loving reproaches, and soon that adventurous day faded for many years from my memory. The only consequence which

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troubled me for long was The Trout's behaviour. My triumphant retort from the coach must have angered her deeply ; she resented it as impudent poaching on her own preserves, and revenged herself cruelly by stopping short in the very middle of her stories whenever I tried to join the audience. In vain I offered her my most precious possessions, even the glittering piece of granite ; she remained hostile, and it took a most unusual circumstance to soften her hard heart.

One summer afternoon a thunderstorm broke. It grew very dark in the house ; the thunder came rolling heavily from the black-shrouded mountains. My mother was in another room, and I was standing at the window watching the sky. White lightning flashed like a scrawl over the slaty background. The suddenness of the apparition was overwhelming, and I clapped my hands with joy. The maid, blenching, put a stop to my outburst, lit a small black candle, fixed it on the edge

The Trout

of the table, and began to pray. But with a short, harsh crackle the room and the whole world shimmered with blue flame ; then there was silence. Somebody shrieked from below : “ The ranger’s house is on fire ! ” People came running, and in a trice I was among them. A light rain was falling as we covered the short distance to the well-known hillock. I got as near to the conflagration as the heated air would allow ; the primitive majesty, the terrifying logic of the flames drew me like a spiritual force. How utterly without malice was that fire ! Like a capable workman who knows what he has to do, it had fastened on everything combustible, and now was serenely licking it up and flaring sky-high in beauty. But hastily, with pails and buckets, people were rushing to the brook, scooping up water and flinging it on the flames. That stirred me to emulation ; I found a small rusty tin on a rubbish-heap and ran unweariedly to and fro between the brook and the

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house, scattering water. Sweat trickled from my forehead. I noted it with satisfaction and redoubled my industry. Then someone touched me on the shoulder ; I looked up ; it was The Trout.

“ Let it be ! ” she said, while tear after tear splashed down her freckled cheeks, “ it’s no use bothering now. The beds and the crockery and the goats are all out, and as for the rickety old house, that doesn’t matter much.”

It suddenly dawned on me that there was really nothing of the house left, and that the grown-ups had left off trying to salvage it. Beside a heap of rescued goods and chattels the two goats were standing tethered to a small tree, eating grass. The ranger and his wife were staring composedly at the glowing embers and listening to a bearded man in a small green hat. Not one of the village children was to be seen ; I was the only one who had been lucky enough to evade his mother. I turned round, and there in brilliant hues

The Trout

an enormous rainbow arched over the darkly raining world. That sense of freedom which we always feel when light escapes from its wonted rigorous confinement and flings itself joyously abroad in all its colours awoke in me with primal strength. "The end of the world!" I yelled in terror and delight.

"It's only a rainbow," The Trout informed me. "We could go and find it. It stands on basins of gold in the grass."

"Let's go and get them! And then you'll be able to buy a new house." I seized her hands and tried to drag her away.

"Better not," said The Trout, resisting me. "We're both barefoot, and the grass is full of adders."

"Let's put on shoes and stockings," I persisted.

"No, we shouldn't, really," she returned thoughtfully.

"Why not?"

"Because if you don't think about the

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basins of gold and find them just by chance they belong to you and bring you luck. But if you set out to look for them that's a sin."

"Besides," she added, a little later, "we don't need the money. The State has to build us a brand-new house, much better than the old one. The State has plenty of money. The head ranger told us that."

Suddenly she began to cry again, and as if I were the only thing the fire had left her she clasped me convulsively, while I noted with surprise that a large piece had already vanished from the lovely rainbow.

CHAPTER III

THE MARKET-PLACE

HOW happy we are while still at the stage of not knowing the names of things, while everything seems unique and eternal, while we are still ignorant of the unfathomable recurrence of forms! Hardly had I begun to realise my environment and to play a small part in it myself when I was suddenly transported into a new one; there was a break in my life and an empty, bewildered pain, and it was but slowly that the old and the new amalgamated.

The old district doctor of Kading, a pretty market town in the lower Bavarian plain, had gone elsewhere, and my father hurriedly took over his practice. We were given a flat with numerous large rooms in the hotel of the Three Helmets at the northern end of the market-place. It was

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an important change for a boy who until then had lived with the mountains for a background, trailing absorbedly from brook to garden, and from garden to leaf-clad house, and who now found himself penned in by two long and two short rows of buildings, which overawed him with their huge vaulted and terraced gables and spied on him through countless windows and peep-holes, while he himself had little power of retaliation. That the butcher's premises were washed a pale pink, the inns brownish, the church, parsonage, and school pure white, was my first discovery, and with that the market-place began to lose some of its strangeness. Then I saw that over every house door there was affixed the picture of a saint ; this was lovely, and gave me an exalted conception of the character of the occupiers, which rooted itself so firmly that for a long time the grossest proofs to the contrary hardly undeceived my eyes, let alone my feelings. There was a marvellous picture at the

The Market-place

southern end of the market. Looked at from the side it was merely a glass-covered shrine divided into small equal spaces by long thin slats of wood painted on both sides. When one came nearer the slats seemed to grow together, and out of this fusion the risen Christ suddenly appeared pointing to His golden heart which glowed through all His body. But that lasted for only a second ! If one went further the image broke up, the slats moved away from each other again, and the painting in the background was revealed, God the Father, the cloud-girt creator of the world, upholding the planets. A few more steps and this picture too disappeared, again the slats grew together, and there shone out the silvery dove of the Holy Ghost flying over dark-green waters. The owner of this treasure was a night-watchman who was also the grave-digger of Kading, a notorious character of whom it was rumoured that out of greed he had starved his own brother to death. Many a horrible

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story about him came to my ears, and whenever I met him in the square I shrank from him. But if I passed by his house and lingered to see the Holy Trinity slowly reveal itself I used to think him fine and honourable as he sat at the window in his black tasselled cap, and I always gave him a courteous good evening. His evil repute hovered somewhere near, but the magic of the picture kept it at bay.

So in the beginning I travelled through time in the market-place as if in a ship with a high bulwark of houses over which I could not see. Yearly fairs, trains of pilgrims, passing troops, bands of gypsies and dancing bears traversed it, but all these seemed at first only like flotsam and jetsam cast up by sudden waves, and like a true ship's rat I regarded the sober daily round of the market-place as the real stuff of life.

None the less, on Corpus Christi day one had to realise that all the other days were but a preparation for this one. The

The Market-place

market-place was then like an enormous hall open to the sky, with a moving tapestry of people with lights, banners, and images all round the walls. Before it was yet day the ground was strewn with reeds and leafy branches, and when the procession was formed garlanded children ran in front of the chanting choirs scattering rose and lily petals on that fragrant carpet. Four altars were raised beside four houses for the four evangelists; young birch trees, bound and offered up at all the door-posts and window-sills, mingled their dying breath with the pungent incense which stole little by little into every house. Cloth of scarlet striped with gold hung from every window, and rows of burning tapers smoked before the holy pictures. Mighty waves of sound from the praying and singing crowd clashed in the air; the men's choir, the women's choir, the choir of young women, of boys, of girls—each let itself go in song and praise without paying any heed to the others, except

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when one tried to drown the rest. And when at last all the hymns blended in one unending swell, and to the clangour of horns and trumpets was added the combined voices of all the bells, there arose a very billow of sound which dashed so high that it toppled ; until all at once the signal tinkled, the priest elevated the golden casket, and the transubstantiation of the Host, irradiating a small wafer, bowed the people and struck them dumb.

This festival was carried through with the almost distressing splendour of an age which is no longer sure of its faith ; it intoxicated without fructifying the soul, unlike the Easter and Whitsuntide festivals which could call on the whole of Nature to help in their celebration. Children who are born in a changing world which has not yet found its own valid festivals early get an inkling of such things ; the melancholy of Sundays enters into them, and they are glad when evening comes and

The Market-place

they can doff their Sunday clothes and look forward again to a weekday : for it is the weekday which gives them their real joys and the great sorrows which strengthen life even while they seem to shatter it.

Nobody turns children from a door, and so in a short time I learned all the activities of the town. Once some of my playmates took me into their parents' yard, and there on a round grassy bank in loose disorder lay countless ribbons, leaves, and snippets of some white stuff which scented the whole of the surrounding air. The children explained that this was the wax the bees had made, which had been yellow at first but had got bleached white in the dull weather. I asked if I could have a little of it, and was given a handful. It was out of the question for me to keep such a treasure to myself ; I ran home and gave it to my mother. She laid her sewing aside, shook the wax into the hollow of her hand, weighed it as if it

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were a precious metal, and showed such delight as I had rarely seen in her. She said that it was stuff which never wore out, she would keep it safe for me, and she launched forth in praise of the good, industrious bees. I asked if the bees knew that we were pleased with them.

“There are creatures,” she said, “which do good without knowing it. The bees think of nothing but their own interests ; they gather honey-dew all summer and build their waxen houses as best they can. But when the cold comes they fly home ; the frost numbs them, and on Christmas Eve when you are enjoying the honey-cakes and the wax candles, then they are hanging rigid, clustered together like a bunch of grapes, and have their own dreams.”

Something like that was what my mother said ; but I was vexed at her excessive praise of the bees. Not long before a bee had stung me on the temple, a pain which I simply could not forget.

The Market-place

I now wanted to know whether that one had been a good little creature.

“Bee-stings are healthy ; they purify one’s blood,” answered my mother, getting up and leading me to a cupboard which had never been opened in my presence. There in the upper division lay the casket with her jewels along with little boxes with blonde and silver locks of hair and many other legacies ; she brought out at last two large pieces of wax made up to look like books decorated with gilt scrolls and flowers. These waxen books could be opened ; one was empty, but in the other lay a Christ Child, his arms raised in blessing and a coronet of bright stars round his little head. The empty one was now filled with the wax I had been given, and after telling me to look for a little while longer at the holy Child my mother shut up the books and the cupboard once more.

CHAPTER IV

THE GARDEN

FROM the earliest bright days of March we passed all the fairly sunny hours in the garden. It was not close to the house ; one had to go through the yard and a large beer-garden shaded with chestnut trees in order to reach this kingdom of my mother's. It was bounded on the other sides by a neighbour's orchard and a narrow lane. In the middle of it stood a light grey urn, cracked right across, on which the half-crumbled bodies of naked children were only just recognisable. Here we used to linger in the evenings before going indoors, discussing the prospects for next day and the work to be done.

Under the free sky in the garden my mother became a different being from what she was upstairs in the drug-infested

The Garden

flat ; she took things much more easily, was less shy of people, and was also less severe with me than usual. But she was by no means disposed to let me hang around her in idleness. As soon as the soil was dug over and divided into beds she pressed me into her service.

“ We must work hard,” she said, “ if we are to have pretty flowers and fine vegetables. To-day I’ll show you the flower seeds ; have a good look at them ; then in the autumn you’ll be able to gather them yourself and see the difference between them.”

With curiosity I gazed at the sealed paper envelopes each of which bore the vividly coloured picture of a flower corolla over a name. One after another was opened and its contents scattered in minute quantities. There were tiny grey-brown bullets, little leaves, and microscopic dry sticks ; many indeed were like dirty chaff dust or snuff ; and it was with incredulous delight that I heard that the beautiful

A Childhood

flowers pictured on the envelopes were to grow out of these wrinkled and discoloured odds and ends. But it was impossible to doubt my mother's words, and I vowed to devote my energies to helping the miracle on. Soon, as carefully as the mistress herself, I was drawing straight drills with my finger through the small border, strewing seeds in them, writing names on bits of wood, and sticking them in to mark off the different sorts.

Later she taught me to distinguish the young plants from each other while they were still so tender that their future shape was only just perceptible. She also trained me to remark those green grubs which imitate the colour of the leaves they live on and devour, and to discriminate in general between those insects which are noxious to plants and must be destroyed, and those which are harmless or beneficial and must be spared. Her strict orders for the extirpation of the former put me in

The Garden

many a quandary. She was not always at hand when a suspect turned up, and I was often left to decide its fate myself. If its evil propensities were at all doubtful I used to evade the issue by reading it a severe lecture and then throwing it into the neighbour's garden. As time went on I relied more on my own sensibilities, believing them to be impeccable guides. All the creatures whose appearance delighted me, especially the small iridescent beetles of a delicate red and green, I let go again with kindly words, as they were obviously approved by God ; but I hardened my heart against all dark and ugly things like mole-crickets, earwigs, and millepedes, and above all against those creatures that scuttled rapidly away, for I took their haste to be evidence of a bad conscience. The doctrine of heaven and hell was already working powerfully upon me ; my earlier open-mindedness towards everything was obscured, and I was beginning to hate the small monsters as

A Childhood

offspring of the devil. Many a year had to elapse before I learned once more to understand that our horror of queer little creatures springs only from ignorance of their nature and from reading our own misgivings into them. Sometimes marvellous little earth-spiders turned up, and these I could never bring myself to destroy, although they were well in the forefront of my mother's black list. They were bright red and had the firm softness of silk ; like living jewels they emerged from the black soil and quickly vanished again. I liked to let them run along to the tip of my forefinger until the sun shining through them looked like bright red blood, and then I let them go. But if they came too near my mother I furtively scattered earth over them.

As a reward for my industry one day a plot of ground in a corner was given me to do what I liked with. Like all children I had a native wish to be invisible, to be hidden safely in darkness while peering

The Garden

out at the bright dangers of the daylight, and so I wanted to plant my little fief with tall growths bigger than myself in which I could conceal myself as in a wood. So my mother gave me sunflower plants and giant hemp and some Turkish poppies to fill up my future wilderness and give it colour.

Imperceptibly, through storm and sunshine, the year of the garden grew towards its zenith ; I became more and more an attendant Robin Goodfellow, working even more zealously behind the mistress's back than before her face. The time came when we reaped the harvest of our toil. The kitchen vegetables stood strong and sturdy, but they were hardly noticeable ; the greater part of the garden was flooded from fence to fence with such a sea of blossom that even the busiest passer-by paused to look at it. At the close of evening the neighbours gazed silently in, children begged flowers for their games, and when great celebrations were afoot

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strange gardeners came to get some of our wealth for their bouquets and garlands.

I had long given up killing creatures that passed for noxious, but those which visited our garden now came only to enhance its loveliness. Clusters of lilac blossoms which were hanging down from the urn attracted very shy butterflies which never settled but sipped on the wing, fluttering so rapidly meanwhile that the eye could apprehend nothing of their form but a nebulous greyish-yellow mystery.

On rounded leafy cushions rested the purslane flowers which silkily unfolded in the sunshine, but closed quickly into buds as soon as a large cloud cut off any light. Round these in a small circle grew red garden flax, and outside that again a ring of strong greyish-white leaves that were pointed and hairy like the ears of young rabbits.

Salpiglossis or Trumpet-tongue was the name of a lovely flower whose blooming

The Garden

we hailed as a great occasion. The velvety inner surface of its deeply indented bells was the colour of some large moth with golden-yellow markings as if done by a fairy pen. The long borders everywhere were edged with pansies, whose broad faces, my father asserted, did not turn towards the sun but always towards the path which people frequented most. Between china-blue coronals and white-rimmed purple cups there arose a species of verbena whose shy deep red flowers kindled late and sparsely, but once lit kept burning until far on into the autumn. By the fence stood monkshood, abused as poisonous, but a flower which houses a secret known only to children : one has only to take off its cowl and there between one's fingers is the most delicate blue carriage with silver shafts drawn by tiny doves. Shrinking in a corner were some bushy plants we had not set : nobody knew what they were called. A bare dark red stem, about as tall as a Christmas-tree

A Childhood

candle, broke out into a crown of hard narrow leaves which curved downwards and were of a shiny leathery-green on top, but underneath of the same red as the stalk. The whole plant resembled a little tree and reminded me of the Oriental palms I had seen pictured in the school Bible. My mother considered them weeds, but left them standing at my urgent request.

Thus did the spirit of the plant world play around us in countless adventurous forms, and I sported with it as well as I could. But the mistress slowly trained me to admire certain flowers for their sheer loveliness alone. In the second year I already looked at many things with her eyes, and in the end we both experienced our most divine rapture when all the chaos of diverse shapes seemed suddenly irrelevant as, after a long and strenuous budding, the simple idea of the rose serenely opened out before us.

CHAPTER V

THE FIND

FROM conversations at table I knew that the previous doctors of Kading had lived in our house too, and one day my mother complained that all these gentlemen had left their old lumber behind in the garret, a great pile of rubbish had accumulated, and it would be a stiff task to pick out what was still employable. Although I was forbidden to set foot in this room, I resolved to explore it. On a rainy day, while my mother was busily sewing, I waited with longing until my father led the horse in its jingling harness out into the yard ; then I ran up the stairs leading to the attic, pushed back the heavy trap-door with my head and shoulders, and stood at last in the unfamiliar half-light.

The ancient, close, and musty atmosphere

A Childhood

of the room drove me at first back to the door again ; but soon my eyes grew accustomed to it, and in wonder I gazed at the sloping bare roof and the beams thickly covered with cobwebs bending over me. On some of the roof tiles there were strange grey knobs such as I had never seen before ; I tore off the one nearest me, which felt like blotting-paper and could be stripped into layers ; but suddenly small wasps were creeping over my hands, and I threw the thing away as far as I could. Opening one of the window shutters I saw something dark falling, looked for it, and found that it was a dead bat. Dried like a mummy, but with its greyish-brown hide uninjured, it seemed to me not unworthy of being preserved in my coat pocket for the time being ; I had no doubt that some day a good use would be found for it.

Seen from the attic window the market-place and the neighbouring houses looked strangely unfamiliar and altered ; but

The Find

every object that I knew was there ; this raised my spirits, and I eagerly resumed my search.

A tall cabinet with blistered yellow varnish awoke my cupidity because of its countless drawers, each furnished with an incomprehensible inscription ; I pulled them out one after another and pushed them in again. Each of them contained some kind of sharp-smelling herb or powder, which was of no use to me. In one of them, however, I found little transparent bluish-green crystals of which I only dared to pocket a few, for I took them to be precious stones ; they may have been sulphide of copper. Another drawer contained rolls of detachable gummed labels on each of which was a horrible skull and cross-bones ; these I already knew from the glasses in my father's poison cabinet, and was acquainted quite well with their significance. I contented myself with one of those rolls and turned to a book-case which was standing beside the window.

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It belonged to my father ; the tall gold-lettered leather backs were known to me from my Königsdorf days, and I was about to pass the case when a faded violet silk portfolio which stuck out at a slant arrested me. When I opened it there fell out a yellow note-book which I glanced through on the spot, and with a little effort I was able to decipher the writing in it, which faintly resembled my mother's, but yet was quite different ; for by the time that I was five my mother had already taught me reading and writing. Slowly spelling out every letter I unravelled word after word, line after line, but noticed with disappointment that the rhymes which I had been looking forward to did not turn up. In vain I repeated aloud the last words of several lines one after another : none of them would chime. All the same I considered this find important enough to stick in my pocket along with the bat, the precious stones, and the death's heads.

At last I went over to a chest which

The Find

was filled with old medical instruments. Lancets, scissors, horribly bent pincers, saws, tweezers, and spatulas were tangled together, a confusion of things of whose use I already possessed some idea. I had decided to content myself for the time being with a tiny pair of tweezers, when in my search I found an object which gave me quite a different feeling from the others. Hastily seizing it I started back again ; brown, wrinkled fingers, outspread and slightly bent, projected from the confusion of instruments, and it almost seemed to me that I detected a faint movement in them.

All things, even the most horrible, when we encounter them, must take on a form consonant with our own nature ; everyone has a profound knowledge of this, and because of it good men live in the world without fear. I was not a nervous child ; and if I had no desire to look at death, neither did I ever try to avoid it. With a feeling of solemn exaltation, while a

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shudder which brought tears to my eyes ran over me, I had seen in the mortuary the robed dead lying between their burning candles, and I had not thought of corruption. The feeling that the invisible God, Who chose to manifest Himself only in shadowy hints, had here for once operated solemnly and immediately ; this childish feeling with its grave terrors mastered me and allowed no trace of animal panic to arise. Strangely comforted I went my way, and everyone I met for a while afterwards seemed to me very beautiful and pleasant.

But what I saw before me now was neither a corpse nor a skeleton, yet recalled both. My curiosity grew along with my fear, and when I was convinced that the fingers did not move I seized them and pulled, every now and then starting back, but stubbornly pulling again, until I had drawn out a whole rickety human arm complete with shoulder-blade and collar-bone. From the wrist upwards the skin was

The Find

missing ; withered bunches and ropes of muscle clung round the huge bones.

I carried my horrible find to the window and examined it from every side. Then I laid it back in the chest, closed the lid again, sat down on it, and fell into thought. Suddenly it was clear to me that I must show the arm to my mother. Even if she should punish me for my disobedience—even then the punishment would be easier to bear than the burden of such a secret. My mother, I told myself, was almost as clever as my father ; she was always reading in his big books, and she would know what the arm meant and what should be done with it. So once more I took the gruesome thing out of the chest and dragged it slowly, still in deep reflection, down the stairs.

It was tea-time, and the maid-servant was on her way with teapot and cups from the kitchen to the living-room. She screamed like an animal, became chalk-white, and while crockery and spoons

A Childhood

clattered to the floor, leaned against the wall with wide staring eyes. Hurrying out, my mother took in the position at once, and without troubling about me for the moment, ran to the half-fainting girl, led her to a chair, fetched drops, held them under her nostrils, and as the maid slowly recovered, sought to explain the cause of her fright to her. The arm, she said, was an anatomical object, and had belonged to a former doctor in Kading ; every doctor had to study and investigate for years such parts of the human body, so as to be able to heal them later. Finally the cook herself laughed at the fright she had had and only bewailed the broken cups, while my mother soothed her. But at the end she was still convinced that it would be a sin and might bring ill-fortune on the house if one left the arm, which perhaps had belonged to a good Catholic Christian who would be asked to produce it at the Resurrection Day, to lie among old rubbish instead of burying it in conse-

The Find

crated ground ; whereupon my mother promised to ask the priest about it at the first opportunity.

Fault and punishment turned out to be lighter than I had expected. I was compelled to carry the arm back immediately to its former resting-place, and was sentenced to put up a special prayer for the unfortunate soul of the unknown dead man after my usual evening prayer. In the evening my mother brought out a book in which there was a picture of an arm exactly like the one I had found ; she tried to explain to me what bones, joints, sinews, and muscles were, and put the book back again. But I was congratulating myself on the lightness with which I had got off, and on my not inconsiderable booty. The bat was put in spirits ; the little stones and the death's heads were secure finds. Gradually the tweezers proved to be indispensable, and even the poems provided me with amusement enough on rainy days. I could never

A Childhood

bring myself to throw them away ; and after many years I found them still preserved among my picture books. They were the odes and epodes of old Jacobus Balde, translated out of the Latin in the measures of the original by a brother of my mother's who had died young. Naturally the meaning of these Songs remained closed to me ; but the metres sang, and the less I understood the lines, the more pleasure I derived from them. I was enraptured too by the elegant old-fashioned script, and when I was alone I imitated it, a task I succeeded in with curious ease, as if my fingers had already been prepared for it. Through continued practice I achieved a close resemblance to my model, but concealed my affectation from others, and took care not to employ this script in my school exercises. But, undertaken in play, it refused later to be rooted out ; it went on growing as a part of myself, so that it can still be recognised in my handwriting to-day.

CHAPTER VI

SCHOOL

MY mother held that one could not begin learning soon enough, and in my sixth year sent me to school, to which I got accustomed but slowly. My pretty satchel of hide covered with smooth, grey hair, was in truth the only thing that gave me pleasure for weeks ; and that too I soon spoiled, though my intentions regarding it were good. Once when I did not want to have my hair cut, and my mother remarked that hair would not grow beautiful and strong unless thoroughly cropped, a great light dawned on me and I fetched the scissors and clipped away pitilessly at the lovely grey fell of my satchel, which I had always felt as something alive ; whereupon I carried my work triumphantly to my mother, who was very distressed, but had nothing

A Childhood

conclusive, as it seemed to me, to set against my reasonings.

For a while the only thing that gave me pure joy was the Biblical stories, which were collected in a little brown book and printed in large lettering as if for the eyes of old people. In the simple wood-cuts which illustrated them I always searched first for the bad people, was astonished that they did not look different from the good, and sought to remedy this defect by drawing thin bandages over their eyes in pencil. But this childish activity soon dispersed when the excellent teacher Bogenstetter took over my education in Kading. He knew how to give a luminous present-day reality to those ancient scenes enacted against the dim background of time ; he showed the good in all their endless happiness, the wicked in all the grief and dazed stupor of their forlorn wanderings, so that I began to love the second almost as much as the first, and in shame rubbed out my bandages again.

School

Why we should be made to learn other things as well as the moving events in the two Testaments I could not see for a long time. Once I had to solve a sum in my head, and after many bootless and confused attempts said frankly to the teacher that I wouldn't be able to manage it, he should allow me instead to tell the story of young Tobias and the angel, for I knew it from beginning to end ; whereupon a roar of laughter broke out which I did not understand.

So, afraid and happy, reluctant and compliant, I passed over into the new dispensation and in the process fared not too badly, except that my relations with my school comrades were influenced by an unpropitious star. True, some of the boys were friendly ; but the strong and influential in particular saw in me an intruder who must be driven out again or at least radically remoulded. In particular a joiner's son called Reisinger, who later became important for me as I for him,

A Childhood

daily enumerated to me all the points in which I differed offensively from the native Kading boys ; walk, speech, manners, clothes, name—everything about me appeared to him and his satellites ridiculous and deserving of hatred ; and so nonchalantly did they assume the semblance of righteousness that soon I looked upon myself as being guilty and strove for nothing but to become like them and to be acknowledged as one of themselves. It was the first time that I had found myself confronted with a hostile and intrusive regard, a thing which neither the old nor the young endure easily ; for while the most humble animal may feel complete and self-sufficient, all our life we human beings feel that we are but a rough sketch, and that even to regard one another too closely is to be unjust.

As my town cut of clothes excited particular disapproval, I wearied my mother day after day with petitions that she should let me run about like the

School

Kading boys in clogs, long wide trousers, rough bright-coloured jacket, a silver watch-chain decorated with wild boars' teeth over a red velvet waistcoat, and gold ear-rings. However, she wanted to clothe her son after her own taste and gave me to know that she would easily find ways to have my persecutors punished ; I had only to give her their names. But I would have none of that ; my aim was to win the recognition and respect of my school-mates, not to see them punished, and from now on I remained silent at home about my unpleasant encounters. Reisinger often sought pretexts for fighting me, but I avoided them. In spite of his lanky, large-boned body, he was regarded as a sickly boy, and was said to have a nervous affliction ; his face was pale and sallow, and the features were so strangely distorted that whenever I saw them they daunted me, so that out of pure fear I would scarcely have dared to oppose him seriously. But he was also older and more

A Childhood

developed than I, was a good runner, and surpassed most of the other boys in turbulence. He knew this and he would not put up with joking or insults. If I was fetching cheese from the grocer's he always found some bandit-like way of exacting tribute, and I never passed him with a full flask of methylated spirit without his winning his bet that he could swallow straight off a whole mouthful—his cap meanwhile pushed jauntily back on his head—without the tears coming to his eyes. “That warms your heart, that strengthens your nerves,” he would say then almost good-humouredly, but if I refused to imitate him by taking a good swig he let me feel at once the weight of his contempt.

Yet so long as I was confronted face to face by my enemies I did not really dislike them ; only when I was alone did I begin to hate them, and once when they had gone a little too far I declared them all, individually and collectively, deserving of

School

death. The very same day I symbolically carried out the sentence. I tore off one of those frightful labels for each of my tormentors and pasted them secretly on their house doors, by which act the matter was settled so far as I was concerned ; and indeed I would have forgotten this prank like many another had it not come to my ears many years later that by doing it I had unluckily caused a great calamity. One good old grandmother when she saw her little house marked out so fearfully with the skull and cross-bones perceived in it an unkind warning from the beyond, and took it so to heart that she immediately fell into dejection, refused food and drink, and died in a few weeks.

At that time I had no foreboding of these sad consequences ; after the easy satisfaction of my revenge I stood once more with a stout heart in the camp of my enemies, tried to make myself more and more like them, and believed that my day among them would soon come.

CHAPTER VII

THE MAGICIAN

ALL one summer the garden was occupied almost daily by a strange guest. I have never been able to tell when he appeared for the first time ; he was simply there. My father called him Uncle Georg and treated him with great respect. Stormy years seemed to lie behind him ; his talk was all of adventures encountered and successes achieved. To visitors he occasionally offered his snuff-box, and related complacently that an Austrian arch-duke had presented it to him as a mark of particular favour and admiration. On the lid there was a half-length portrait of a beautiful lady, whose only clothing, so far as I can rightly remember, was a black band round the throat. What was the nature of the old man's achievements I could not picture to myself, nor was I curious about them at first. Now and

The Magician

then the postman brought a letter which I was allowed to carry out to him ; I saw from the address that he had the same name as ours, but for the rest he was designated sometimes as a clothier, sometimes as an independent gentleman, and again as a former illusionist from Passau. I learned too that he had stayed in that town, and that a little while ago his wife had died there. My mother spoke of him as a sick and very old man with one foot in the grave, who had already visited all the spas on account of his heart troubles, but had at last found his road to Kading. The remoteness and quietude of this spot might help him, but more particularly the presence of his nephew, to whose healing powers he trusted a great deal.

Once I had to carry another letter out to my great-uncle in the garden, and this time under his name I read : " Parish Councillor and former Magician." The Trout had already told me about magicians ; now we had one living with us, and

A Childhood

the thought that he might suddenly give his powers free play filled me with fear and hope. I withdrew into my sunflower thicket and there at my ease observed the old man, now become so remarkable. Generally he sat in an easy chair beside the urn ; a glass with yellow medicine stood before him on a little table, and in his hands he often held a black-covered book whose gilt edges glittered in the sunlight. He was long and lean, with a bald skull full of unevennesses to which clung a thin chaplet of discoloured hair. Behind great, round horn spectacles his grey eyes flitted with strange slowness hither and thither ; his lips, surrounded by a silvery beard, had the same dark blue colour as ours had after eating blackberries. His feet in their black slippers were always somewhat swollen, so that his white socks had a stretched look. Occasionally he would throw his head back and gaze with a terribly resolute look at the sky, pressing his breast with his hand

The Magician

and breathing in short jerks. This alteration in the old man was very fearful to see, but it never lasted long ; when it was past he turned to his book again as if nothing had happened.

I had with me my blue rubber ball with the silver stars, and suddenly I threw it out of my thicket at the old man sitting in his chair. In doing this I had no intention of hitting him, but only wished to attract his attention, and with pleased terror I watched the flying ball falling in front of him, rebounding high, and while the old man started back, disappearing into the quickset hedge. Then I rushed out laughing, expecting that he would understand the joke and respond to it. But a rough reception awaited me.

“ Fie ! Always lurking in corners like a spider ! ” he spluttered malevolently, and when I continued to laugh he ordered me in a dreadful voice of which one would not have thought his suffering frame capable, to look to my work.

A Childhood

“ See how you let the garden go to ruin, you idle rascal ! Weeds growing everywhere, stones left lying among the flower-beds, the soil swarming with vermin—there ! look at them moving ! see them trying to get through ! You lazy creature ! May I fall from this chair if there isn’t a mole-cricket hiding there ! Dig ! Dig ! Don’t let it get away ! ”

Leaning far forward he pointed with his hand to a patch in the nearest border, and actually I thought I saw a faint heaving and loosening of the soil. With both hands I shovelled away the mould, but found nothing.

“ Have you found the nasty thing ? ”

“ Not yet, Herr Grand-Uncle,” I said.

“ But of course you’ve got it, you little donkey ! Are you blind ? It’s crawling over your hand, now it’s going up your arm, on your neck, into your mouth ! ”

He made a gesture as if of despair, and then I actually felt something crawling over my gums and spat in terror.

The Magician

“Come, let me help you, my boy. Open your mouth,” he commanded in a compassionate voice, then forcing my jaws asunder, he peered in and said “Aha !” like a dentist, passed his finger over my tongue, and held up before my eyes with a good-humoured laugh a thick squirming mole-cricket which he at once flung to the ground with a malediction and squashed with a swollen foot.

This rough jest was presently followed by more kindly ones ; but danger was never far away, and whenever my grand-uncle scented resistance it pounced on me. Often he would order me to bring him flowers which he caused to vanish as I was in the act of handing them to him, to produce them at last after a long search out of a pocket ; sometimes he would change white Chinese carnations into red ones ; sometimes when he was cross with me he would bind me with a spell so that standing in the middle of the garden path I could not take a step back or forward.

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He pretended always not to notice what was happening, and then said the garden was bewitched and he could not stay there any longer, the very next day he would have to leave. At that I used to dance round him like a drunken savage, shouting "No, you mustn't leave! You're a magician, you must stay with us and work magic every day," and he would only smile. Actually I was convinced that I was on the brink of an age of supreme marvels. What my great-uncle had done up to now I looked upon as mere jest, a preparation for the real miracle, and as to that I had certain wishes which for the time being I kept to myself. A genuine child of man, I had quickly become impatient of the gentle restraints by which life was leading me on, and confidently hoped to see them soon thrown off on every side. Also I felt in every nerve that I was called to be a great magician, and hoped very soon to throw my school-mates into astonishment.

Once when after a harmless piece of

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conjuring with a pocket-handkerchief I was indulging in my usual boundless rapture, the old man was overtaken by one of his painful heart attacks, and indeed a much more violent one than usual. His face paled to a blue tinge, minute drops started out on his forehead, his hand went to his heart. His lips moved strangely, and he stared upwards. Though this sight had always daunted me until now, I caught this time at the notion that my grand-uncle's state might have some connection with his magic arts and be the prelude to a great new piece of jugglery. I began to shout with joy and clap my hands, and cried : "Herr Grand-Uncle, what have you got up your sleeve this time?" Only when with an imploring look he signed to me to be quiet, and in an uncannily weak voice begged me to fetch my father, did I grow abashed and run obediently into the house, though I still did not give up my hope that the scene would yet end merrily.

A *Childhood*

From this afternoon, however, the malady grew worse. The torturing spasms which life releases in the bodies of which it wishes to rid itself recurred now more frequently, my grand-uncle's body and feet swelled, and every day his eyesight grew weaker. His seat in the garden was now out of the question ; our largest room was prepared for him, and there he sat in a big easy chair by the window, his yellow medicine and a silver clock beside him on a little table, and spent his time in sighing. I gravitated between him, the school, and the garden. In the midst of my play in the square I would remember him, hurry home, ask him whether he could not work magic yet, lay flowers in front of him in the hope that he would change them again, and conceal the medicine and the clock to incite him to wonderful deeds. But he paid no attention and the flowers withered. All the same, the less sign he showed of working magic, the more persuaded was I of its existence ; all his

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sufferings, his chokings, his spasms of fear, even his loud lamentations of which I was often an embarrassed witness, could not shake my faith. That magic was a sin I knew from my catechism, and often it seemed to me that the hand of God was upon him ; but in all his visible wretchedness he remained to me the ruler of strange powers, as a true king remains royal even in misfortune.

Then once more everything seemed to improve. The swelling in my grand-uncle's feet decreased, his breathing grew easier, his eyesight clearer, and again he could go about the house and lie comfortably in his bed of nights. Great was my joy ; but my father distrusted this too-rapid recovery, felt the old man's pulse oftener than usual, fetched new decoctions from his pharmacopœia, and prescribed complete quiet, to which my grand-uncle paid little attention. My mother went about quietly making strange preparations and buying candles, and divulged to us one

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morning in strict confidence that the end was near. She had dreamt that she had walked through a strange room in a white robe and in a mirror had seen her reflection coming towards her dressed in black. When my mother had such dreams as these they were infallible premonitions of death ; and she also occasionally foresaw other occurrences, fires in particular. But I only discovered this later ; at that time I still lacked all feeling for evil premonitions, I took such things for mere talk, and put my reliance on the momentary good state of my grand-uncle's health.

At night he often lay awake for hours, and as I slept in the room next to his I was frequently awakened by his loud and incomprehensible monologues. Then I would sometimes slip into his room, and at these conferences which, without preconcerted arrangement, we never mentioned to anyone, he showed himself far more friendly and confidential than during the day, and also allowed me once and for all

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to address him familiarly as "thou." When I pressed him urgently to work a little magic some time again, he replied with a smile :

" You think it's far more easy than it is, you imp ! To work magic as it should be done I need my magic staff. And it's lying far from here wrapped in my magic robe in a chest with three locks. Now listen ! If you'll follow my orders and not enter my room for three days I'm prepared to let you see a few of my tricks. My trusty and nimble Danube sprite—I'm going to call him—just wait——"

He interrupted his talk, stared motionlessly at a corner of the room, and called in a muffled protracted tone :

" Amal ! Amal ! Amal ! "

A plaintive voice answered from the fireplace.

" Make ready ! " breathed my Uncle Georg, " Fly through the air ! Fetch the staff ! the staff ! the staff ! "

" The staff ! the staff ! the staff ! " a

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sighing echo responded from the fireplace, and the old man resumed his accustomed aspect as if nothing extraordinary had happened.

I gazed now at him, and now at the fireplace; cold and trembling I drew my night-shirt round me and pressed close to the bed.

“ I only hope that he doesn’t forget to bring my robes too, for they increase my powers. I would like to use the lumber once more before it’s devoured by the moths and I’m devoured by the worms ! The devil only knows what hands it may fall into when I’m dead ! ”

“ When you die let me have your magic staff ! ” I cried, raising my clasped hands imploringly.

“ What ! Do you want me to die soon then ? ” he enquired quickly.

“ No,” I replied. “ But you’ll have to die some time soon, and I’ll live for a long time yet.”

“ How do you come to know that ? ”

“ I’m small, and you’re very old. And

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in eternity you won't need your magic staff any longer."

He looked at me for a while with a strange expression ; then he groaned and said in a whisper :

" The staff is no use by itself, you must know the magic word as well."

At last he gave me a light slap on the cheek and said :

" It's possible that you'll be a magician some day too, and, God grant, a better one than I am. Or you'll end on the gallows—it's certain to be one or the other. But now toddle off to your bed, and don't let me see you for three days and three nights."

So I waited patiently for the marvellous event, and when the Master called me to him on the third night instead of the fourth it was almost too soon for my wishes. I saw that the position of the furniture was changed, and the room seemed larger than usual. My uncle was standing behind the table on which seven

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candles were burning and all sorts of flasks, beakers, boxes, and cubes glimmered and sparkled. In his red robe inscribed with black symbols and his tall gold-embroidered scarlet cap he had a strange and solemn appearance as of a priest. But what I stared at most of all was the black staff, which only fascinated me the more because it looked so simple and ordinary. A single chair stood in the middle of the room ; I received a silent sign to seat myself. Very faint music, which must have come from a hidden musical box, began to sound. Giving me a nod, my uncle lifted the staff as if in jest, rearranged his paraphernalia yet once more, and now, bit by bit, with one trifling trick after another set his performance going. Little as it may have differed from what can be seen in any good conjuring act, it threw me into a frenzy of delight, and I forgot that it was not really what I had always been secretly expecting. For whenever I was alone and wished for

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marvels to happen, I always thought of those serious, heart-uplifting miracles which occurred in the Biblical stories, or of things which would fulfil my most urgent present desires, and never of the coloured, gaily irresponsible sorceries which now passed with such intoxicating reality before my eyes. Murmuring to himself he walked to and fro, now and then calling out some incomprehensible word in a subdued voice, especially when he tapped an object with his staff. To me he seldom spoke ; once he commanded me to bring a new white pocket-handkerchief. He unfolded it and made as if he were going to wipe his spectacles, but in doing this he held it imprudently near to a candle, it took fire, and slowly began to burn. I cried : “ The handkerchief is burning ! ” He started back, signing to me, however, to remain still, threw the handkerchief on the floor, stamped out the flames, and assumed an expression of troubled reflection. At last an idea seemed to occur to

A *Childhood*

him ; he took a flask from the table, unstoppered it, made a few passes with the staff over it, and stationed it in readiness. Thereupon he assembled the almost charred rags of the handkerchief, threw them into a green beaker, pressed them tightly down as one presses tobacco into a pipe, and sprinkled them with water from the flask. Then with one hand he raised the beaker while with the other he corked it, shook it, and at the same time murmured over and over again a strange-sounding word. And then the miracle happened ! He set the beaker on the table, tapped it three times with the staff, then dipped in his thumb and forefinger, slowly drew out the handkerchief, and threw it to me with a smile. It was as white and neatly folded as when I had given it to him ; I spread it out, not a thread of it was damaged. But I was given no time to marvel ; for now he became merry at last, and advanced to me with a little scrap of paper and commanded

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me to eat it. I put it reluctantly into my mouth and full of disgust began to chew vigorously. He did not let me swallow it, however, but cried, "Stop !" touched my throat with the staff, and slowly drew out of my mouth bit by bit, groaning with the effort, a coloured roll of paper, which was at least three times as long as myself. Alarmed at first, I had soon to laugh ; the roll of paper was so beautiful, and it did not give me the slightest pain. Now one thing followed another so fast that I could not grasp them ; my uncle's jugglings grew madder, and he became younger at the same time. Finally out of all my pockets he charmed silken flowers, violets, myrtle blossom, roses, poppies, bouquet after bouquet, a whole garden. But then the hidden music ceased its playing, and two candles, quite burned down, went out almost at the same moment. The old man groaned, leant his arms on the table, and with bent head stared at his paraphernalia. For a moment it looked as if one

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of his attacks were approaching ; but it did not come to that ; before the dignified regalia the foe seemed to give way. Now my uncle himself blew out all the candles save one, then poured some wine from a little flask into a glass, and commanded me to drink. After I had taken a sip he drank to me and emptied the glass at one draught.

The unaccustomed sip ran through my veins ; I expressed my joy and admiration with greater boisterousness. Suddenly my feelings overflowed, and, not considering how easily it might waken my parents, I flung the glass on the floor so violently that it broke. The magician angrily demanded : “ What are you thinking of ? ” Then I lifted up the wreckage, laid it in front of him, clasped his legs, and begged him as urgently as I could to make the glass whole again. Without touching the splinters he gazed at me darkly for a long time, and said at last : “ Perhaps some other time. I’m too tired to-night.” Now I too noticed that he looked very ill

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and had grown old again ; yet even so he still remained a very magnificent figure. Finally he reached me his hand and said mildly :

“ That was all just fun, just a slight entertainment. The next time we'll have some real magic ! ”

On the following day my grand-uncle came to have lunch at the family table, a thing which had not occurred for a long time. I quickly emptied my plate, and making an excuse ran to his room. Not one of his mysterious instruments was missing. The robe hung over the arm of his easy chair ; also the flask with the magic water, the green beaker, the long cylinder which he had drawn out of my mouth, the scattered flowers, all were there, and the staff lay unobtrusively on the table. At first I touched it cautiously with one finger, then more audaciously, and at last I seized it, swung it, and felt myself expanding with illimitable power. My original longing for real miracles was

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gone, the fever of emulation took hold of me, the resolve to usurp mastery of the magic art and to show my magic powers grew with every minute. Steps alarmed me ; I returned to the lunch table where the coffee was already being brought in, and sat as still as a mouse. But some part of me was working busily on a project, and in the midst of my dreaming and planning I hit upon the very thing. A white cardboard lid was to my hand ; in my largest best script I wrote upon it, " People of Kading ! All come to the summer inn parlour at five o'clock. I shall work magic," set my name underneath, and pinned the announcement to the house door.

The old man's state grew worse in the afternoon, and he had to retire to bed again. The priest arrived and stayed for a little while, and my father was always in the room, which smelt more and more oppressively of pungent medical preparations. I did not trouble myself much with

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what was happening in the house, and kept out of everybody's way. The magical tricks which I had seen during the night had looked so delightfully easy ; what was more certain than that they would come to me just as effortlessly once I had the robe and the staff in my possession ? The hour was drawing near, I could not delay any longer ; with beating heart, resolved to dare anything, I entered the half-darkened room. The whispering watchers who kept quietly going in and out paid no attention to me ; the Master himself was lying in uneasy slumber. Flies buzzed round his bluish lips ; his spectacles lay on the table. With two snatches I had seized the cap, staff, flask, beaker, and a few candles, and run through the house and across the yard to the inn as if I were a thief. The landlady was standing in the window polishing beer jugs. She asked what these pretty things were that I had brought.

“ I've good news for you, Frau Land-

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lady !” I cried. “A great magic performance is going to be given at five o’clock here in your tap-room. Would you like to see it? It’ll make you open your eyes !”

She pretended to be greatly honoured, offered to help me, and set a table in position on which I could spread out my odds and ends. Much encouraged I ran back again and, the patient still being asleep, snatched up the splendid robe and the remaining candles, for they might perhaps be necessary to my success.

When I returned again to the inn a girl was walking about whom till now I had only known by sight and from report. She had not been long in the place ; her parents had owned a circus in Munich and had died young, whereupon their Kading relatives had adopted her while still a child. With her hands behind her back she was regarding my things. When she caught sight of me she mustered me attentively and asked :

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“Are you the magician’s son?”

When I announced that I was myself the magician an astonished “Ah!” escaped her, she nodded prettily, and said :

“I’m Eva Veeders, and I would like to see the performance.”

It was easy to see that she was made of finer and firmer stuff than the other Kading girls. Older and taller than I, from the side she looked like a boy ; in my memory she lives as a girl with a pale tapering face which flushed easily ; her features did not have that look of flying away from each other which those of so many children have, but were compactly formed ; the pupils of her eyes, very dark and large, were surrounded only by a narrow ring of blue ; the eyelids were often slightly inflamed. Her brown hair had a coppery gleam ; not very long, it hung in curls round her neck and shoulders. A breath of the unknown city clung round her ; her frock, though patched in several

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places, was of a novel and elegant cut ; on her bosom hung a little cross composed of tiny dark red stones.

On the table I set the candles which I had brought with me and then spread out the red robe.

“It’s too wide for you,” said the girl. “Just slip into it.”

I was hopelessly lost in the musk-scented robe and waited for Eva Veeders to laugh at me ; but she set about it at once, folded the stuff here, tucked it in there, fastened it with pins which she begged from the landlady, and in a few minutes had fashioned me a tolerably suitable garment. While doing this she talked all the time and told me of several other magicians whom she had known intimately, whereupon I confided to her that I possessed a marvellous magic staff by means of which I could do whatever I wanted ; for instance, I was going to borrow a pocket-handkerchief from someone in the audience, burn it, and then

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make it whole again in the green beaker. At this revelation she looked at me strangely ; such accomplishments as this seemed far to surpass her expectations. Meanwhile the first of the onlookers had appeared, and Eva drew me into the next room ; she did not consider it fitting that the audience should see me before my entrance. I thought that she seemed more reflective and absorbed in her own thoughts ; now and then she put questions whose meaning I did not quite understand ; finally she took up the tall bright cap, tucked it in and shortened it, set it on my head, examined me admiringly, and then said warmly, almost maternally :

“ I tell you what ! I'll be your servant when you're working your magic. Every magician has a servant when he's performing. The servant fetches the things that he needs at the moment, lights the candles, looks after everything, and sometimes helps himself a little with the magic.”

Although I did not think that help was

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in the least needed, yet I was pleased by her offer, and I accepted it gaily. The scene of the night before was clear in my mind ; I waved the staff devoutly, and spied through a peep-hole into the tap-room. About thirty people perhaps had assembled, a few women among them, but the great proportion children. They were sitting round on long tables with their legs dangling ; a few had confiscated all the chairs that were available. Some had ordered glasses of beer, which rejoiced the landlady, who for her part did not neglect to laud me to her guests as a prodigy of ingenuity. The majority looked impressed ; a few whispered and tittered.

Eva went out, procured some candles from the landlady, stuck them into the empty candlesticks, and kindled the seven flames. The room became quiet ; at the sight of the seven lights a tiny girl broke into clear cries of delight. I listened to these with elation, and was ready to burst with impatience ; nothing could hold me

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any longer ; with carefully measured steps I strode out into the room and up to the table. Someone laughed, probably one of my schoolmates surprised by my borrowed magnificence ; I pretended not to notice it ; you'll soon stop laughing, I thought. Muttering to myself I walked to and fro making mysterious signs with the staff, tapping the glasses, the beaker, and, to make sure, the candlesticks too ; and then again waving the staff gently as if I were a conductor. And already the audience shared my certainty ; the grown-ups no less than the children sat silent and open-mouthed along the wall, and when I asked for a pocket-handkerchief a dozen were immediately stretched out to me. I accepted a little handkerchief belonging to one of my schoolmates and spread it out ; it was quite new ; a red linen handkerchief printed with an oval design on which bright green jockeys were riding light brown racehorses over hurdles. Without allowing myself to be hurried, I

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drew it over the magic staff, and in doing so brought it close to one of the candles. It refused to catch at once, but at last the hem began to burn, and everybody cried : “ Oh, look at the handkerchief ! ” Imitating the Master I assumed a concerned expression and commanded the shouters to be quiet, at the same time putting one finger meaningly to my lips. Only when the fire had eaten up half of the handkerchief and I could feel the heat on my hand did I let it fall on the stone floor and stamp out the embers ; at which point I thought it fitting to smile comfortingly and reassuringly at its possessor, who showed some alarm. Now I took up the green beaker, showed the audience that it was empty, while like my uncle I prodded into it with the staff, then set it back again in its place. But now the poor boy could no longer restrain himself ; he stood up, advanced towards me, and asked what was happening to his handkerchief, which he had only lately been presented with on

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his name-day. I commanded strict silence ; otherwise the magic would not work. From now on everybody maintained a breathless, attentive silence. With Eva's help I gathered together the burnt rags, threw them, whispering the while, into the beaker, pounded them together vigorously, and poured water on them from the flask. Then I shook the beaker with all my might, and tapped it yet once more with the transforming wand. Now the moment had come ; I turned to the audience, whose faces looked almost distorted with curiosity, lifted the beaker, put my fingers in, and felt the wet handkerchief still there. My terror was great, but my faith was unshaken ; my only fear was that I had forgotten something important, or that I had not tapped the beaker with sufficient force. The audience became restless. " It's a swindle," a voice growled, but another said reassuringly, " Let him go on." A woman laughed : " What things children

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think of!" But I would not admit failure ; I seized the flask again, poured water on the charred fragments of linen until they were soused, and let fly at the beaker as if my task were to break it to pieces.

All at once in the middle of my feverish exertions the terrible truth overcame me. Everything was useless, bungled from the start ; the mistake was in front of my very nose, but it could not be made good. "The staff is no use by itself ; you must know the magic word as well"—hadn't Uncle Georg told me that once during my nights with him ? The word which he himself had muttered when he changed things, the decisive word, the accomplishing word— : I did not know it. Furiously I gripped and squeezed the smooth black wooden staff, which now, when I needed its help, gave no sign of life. Finally I thought of God, and while my hands helplessly pottered with the apparatus, I secretly bombarded Him with desperate

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prayers. Suddenly Eva Veeders stepped up and said clearly and frankly :

“ This is a very difficult feat of magic, one of the most difficult of all. Very few magicians can bring it off. You must rest for a few minutes. I’ll relieve you. I once served a great magician myself. Give me the beaker and the staff.”

I whispered that I would run over to my uncle and ask him for the magic word ; but she whispered back : “ Stay here ! ” And now she began to manipulate my paraphernalia so wonderfully that everybody became attentive again. She grasped the beaker cautiously as if it were hot, and gave it the lightest of taps on the rim with the staff. Now she would set it on the table, then again she would carry it backwards and forwards swinging it in her hands. At length she gazed into it doubtfully :

“ It doesn’t need much more now—it’s coming right ! It’s coming right ! ” she cried in delight, “ the handkerchief is

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being changed—now it isn't a handkerchief any longer—it's glittering—it might be turning into a star or a lovely precious ring——”

The children who were hurrying forward to see the glories of the beaker she scared back to their places with a forbidding “Not yet” ; rigid, as if she were reading something, she gazed for a few seconds into the beaker while the on-lookers sat as if transfixed—then slowly and hesitatingly, as if she still feared success might escape her, she dipped two fingers in and, pale with joy, lifted a gleaming golden ring, on which red and green jewels glittered splendidly. Then she bowed, it was hard to say to whom, and handed the jewel to the astonished and flattered boy with the remark that with it he could buy if he liked seven new handkerchiefs ; and she added that for his good fortune he had only me to thank, for it had all been my work, and there had hardly been anything left for her to do.

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The boy at once tried the slippery ring on one of his fingers, while I, dumbfounded by this issue, gazed now at the ring, now at Eva—when the door was flung open, and our maid, weeping loudly, came up to me, seized me by the hand, and cried : “ You must come home at once ! Your Uncle Georg is dying. He wants to say good-bye to you.” At that very moment the priest passed bearing the covered Host, and followed by a boy ringing a bell, on his way to our house through wind and whirling leaves. The women and children fell on their knees, and while round me heads were bowed and breasts were beaten, the maid dragged me in the wake of the priest, sobbing as if it were her own father who was dying. While the priest was performing his offices I stood, forgotten by everybody, in the passage. The fact that the dying man had asked for me excited me tremendously. I surmised that he wanted finally to entrust me with his great magic formulas ; while at the same time

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I trembled at the thought of his death. When I was at last admitted everything was already over ; I was commanded to fold my hands, and was handed later a little bundle of twigs to dip in the holy water and sprinkle the corpse with, after which I was sent into the living-room. Shivering with cold though my ears were burning, I sat there in sullen gloom. The boy in whom the sight of the dead had always awakened solemn and good feelings could find now no pious thought, no tear to shed, in his obsession. The only thought in my mind was that the great magical words which my uncle had known were lost forever. I asked the maid to look for Eva and send her to me. But she found the inn already emptied of its guests, and brought back only the magical appliances, which the landlady in the meanwhile had held in safe keeping. I examined the beaker at once. It was empty ; only a tiny fragment of charred linen stuck to the bottom.

CHAPTER VIII

CONFESSION

IT was salutary that now in the midst of my distraction preparations should have begun for my first confession ; through no other event could the confused powers of my soul have been better gathered together and reoriented. At first indeed I tried to escape the whole business, declaring that I could not remember any sins that I had committed, and that I knew with certainty that the good God had long ago forgiven me everything ; but soon, alarmed by the admonitions of my mother and the priest, I fell into the opposite extreme, particularly as my mother helped me to examine my conscience. My vision grew insensibly finer, and recognised grievous blots where hitherto had stretched the clear and happy field of the past. But in a flash, beneath

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the sham-pious hair-splitting, the inborn spirit of play slipped in to save me, and when I was given a pretty note-book with the command to write down my transgressions for clearer examination I found great joy in scribbling on the white pages. More and more zealously I sought out trespasses which I had committed, and set down every find with the complacency of a collector catching and transfixing insects. In doing this I availed myself of my secret script, and between the neatly numbered entries drew little vignettes of stars and flowers.

Now with the examination of one's conscience and the avowal of one's faults the task is not ended ; what the Church demands above all is repentance. Remorse for sin must take hold of the soul ; otherwise confession becomes null and its blessing a curse. So that I might devote myself undisturbed to my conversion I was shut in a little room looking out on the yard for an hour every afternoon, and

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nobody was allowed to interrupt the penitent. I had had presentiments of devoutness before, and exaltations of the heart : they had come without announcement while I was playing or working, while I listened to the church choir or looked upon the dead, or ran across a field during a storm, and then suddenly stood still listening to the humming of my blood which seemed still louder than the tumult of the air. But just now when my whole salvation depended on it my thoughts would not fix themselves on the unseen, I watched the sweep issuing out of a chimney stack, entered into the doings of spiders and flies, and the more I felt bound to assume a pious state of mind, the more my head was filled with crazy notions, and my prayers died on my lips. The soul can easily dissipate itself, but the more widely dissipated the more bound it is ; it must first condense itself into a crystal if it wishes to dissolve completely without leaving any sediment.

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But here too the saving power was not far off. In a drawer I found an old album ; within was the portrait of a young girl of such marvellous beauty that it made me afraid. I had read once of a king's son who on seeing the portrait of a lady had fallen down as if slain by love, and from now on there seemed to me not a word of exaggeration in this fairy tale. What only remained a promise in all other faces was fulfilled in this. Every day I regarded the photograph, and its charm only worked upon me the more deeply when I learned that the girl had long since died. In these moments of contemplation the deceptive barrier of vacancy and indifference was lifted, and when I murmured my prescribed formula of repentance and my good resolutions I felt that they were real, and ratified in my heart all that the words promised.

At last came the momentous afternoon, and once more it was the charm of a human countenance that came to the help

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of my wavering soul. When I approached the high and beautifully-wrought confessional box the usual and almost feared old confessor was not sitting in it, but a young assistant-priest whom I did not know. He had just dismissed a penitent ; he noted my hesitation and made me a sign to approach. Pale and serious, with his clear and somewhat sad face he reminded me of one of the two white marble angels which, larger than life-size, stood in the porch holding out to the faithful the round chalices filled with consecrated water ; but from his surplice barred by the sun's rays arose a perfume like that of the bleached strips of beeswax on the green bank of turf. I knelt down, crossed myself, and whispered the first responses. The fact that I found myself unexpectedly confronted by this seraphic stranger gave me a security and freedom such as I had never guessed at before. No small personal thought disturbed me, mystery wove and grew, it was a veritable ambassador of God

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to whom I knelt and confessed. For the first time I felt that it mattered little whether this or that transgression had been forgotten ; I stood in bliss in the glowing centre of the symbol. Sometimes I forgot that I must whisper and bewailed loudly and volubly the numberless sins recorded in my note-book, until at last he cut me short and by putting questions forced me to give precise answers. The words I had to listen to in the end were neither reproachful nor threatening, but only an exhortation to bring every morning as an offering to the Highest the thoughts and deeds of the day, yet not to torment myself too much, for the Lord of the heavens and the earth would not demand anything beyond measure from a child. After a brief blessing I found myself unexpectedly dismissed, too soon for my avid mood, which made even the imposed act of penitence seem all too small. How I should have loved to stay always with the strange priest ! Everything bad and dis-

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tracting was gone, my whole being was freedom, ardour, and goodness so long as I knelt before him. While I irresolutely got to my feet the other boys were already chattering and pushing close behind me ; I watched with almost a surge of jealousy that he was signing to the next to approach, and went out of the church in a state of strange intoxication.

Of the weeks which followed my memory tells me nothing now ; but I avoided confession thenceforward as much as the vigilance of my preceptor would permit. Perhaps I had a premonition that the beams of grace would not fall on me a second time so overpoweringly ; also my banal and pedantic recital of my sins seemed flat and stale in recollection ; it was as if I had omitted the most important thing of all. And was this feeling wrong ? The uncanny streak of evil which once at least appears in every child,—is not its source in a profound innocence, far beyond thought and word, partaking of the divine ?

A Childhood

Nor is the divine always firmly bound to a temple or to a word ; often it floats like a breath between those who love or hate, and the most desperate hour can attract it like the lightning. But children, like grown-ups, sacrifice willingly to the Unknown God. A boy will bury his most-beloved toy in the garden and take an oath never to dig it up again. The flower seeds which he has learned in his parents' garden to use sparingly and piously he will steal, bear them forth, and scatter them lavishly on the edge of a moor, anticipating in his heart the wanderer's thrill when in that savage spot he is surprised by a show of verbenas and petunias.

Perhaps I should not have lost my taste for confession so soon if that young priest had remained a little longer in Kading ; but I never saw his face again. Nevertheless without knowing it I transferred my faith to his marble brother, the mighty angel who held the chalice with the holy water at the church door. In moments of

Confession

inner need I secretly sought his presence, especially at twilight, and never without comfort. A glance at his solemn and sorrowful face, a brief, shuddering touch of his robes brought more peace to my soul than the frequently peevish words of the living, which even so were not always sincerely meant.

My father was the only man in the place who never went to church or doffed his hat before a crucifix. But the way in which he treated his sick patients was so selfless, so regardless of everything but their suffering, so ingenious, and so fortunate, that in spite of this he was regarded everywhere as a God-fearing man. My education he left to my mother, and only when he foresaw danger did he intervene, yet even then not with reprimands or punishments, but with some significant action which seldom failed of its object. My mother had attacks of anxiety when she voluntarily imposed upon herself renunciations and hard tasks so as to forestall

A Childhood

certain apprehended disasters. Then she would give me legends to read, and guide me too in the way of renunciation. But as in me everything ran to excess I soon outstripped the behests of my preceptress, and gave away playthings, tea-cakes, and boots, imitated the bearing of the poor, went about humbly and bare-foot, and pricked myself on the cheeks with sharp oleander leaves.

Then my father decided upon a severe remedy and took me with him in his carriage to a peasant whose arm a short time before had been badly excoriated by a threshing machine. He carefully unrolled the bandages, and when at the sight of the large wound I started back, he explained quite quietly, while with scissors and tweezers he removed blackened scraps of tissue, that it wasn't so bad as it looked, one only needed to apply and bind on a few strips of fresh and sound skin, and they would take root and grow, and the arm would soon be all right again.

Confession

"I've already told this man," he went on casually, "that you like to sacrifice yourself for others—show now that you're in earnest. Your skin is young and fine ; a few little strips will be enough, they'll grow in as easily as moss."

I thought he was joking ; but already he was coming towards me with his glittering scalpel. Controlling myself in the midst of my terrors, I drew off my little jacket, rolled up my sleeves, and at the same moment glanced across at the sick man ; it seemed to me that he must needs now make a protest against my father's plan. But the man lay with his eyes closed, muttering and groaning, with no thought for anything but his own sufferings. And already the little knife was at work ; my arm was bleeding at several points ; I saw little rolled-up scraps of skin sticking to the blade, and now watched attentively while they were being transferred to the flayed arm of the peasant.

A Childhood

“Another ! It doesn’t hurt in the least !” I said triumphantly, whereupon my father coolly repeated the operation and then quickly bandaged me up.

A few weeks passed in a whirl of vain elation over this glorious adventure, and I told it to everyone I met until my little wounds were healed and the crusts fell off : then all at once I was sobered, and thenceforth avoided the pose of being one of the poor, as well as the pointed leaves of the oleander.

CHAPTER IX

EVA

I WAS sitting alone in the rain-darkened room and rummaging yet once more in the cupboard where the dead man's magical possessions were lying. Often my mother had said that one should not avoid the rooms where people had died, but cheerfully and courageously go on living in them. "Where love ends the ghosts begin," she was accustomed to say, and even if I did not quite understand her words, yet my heart acknowledged them. In the clear radiance of my first sacrament the figure of the magician had grown more and more remote and insubstantial; it was only since I had slid back into the old dull round of existence, committing mistakes and experiencing misunderstanding, that it had approached anew. Now before me lay the staff, the robe, the cap, the

A Childhood

beaker, and the flowers. My mother had allotted them all to me : they were my legacy. But how did the magical words run which awoke the powers of these things ? In the church there were saints : when one prayed to them, God had so ordained it that one received what one asked for. But here none of them could help, not even Anthony ; none of them would have anything to do with the affair. I set great hopes on Eva ; but more and more it became clear that she could not perform any real marvels. She did not want to hear anything more about the whole business, she was always wanting to leap and climb, and she sometimes almost smothered me with her affection—and what good was that to me ? If I asked how she had transformed the handkerchief into the ring, she would laugh and say at last that the whole business had been a swindle, the ring had only been worth ten pfennigs at most, she had happened to have it on her, and still possessed two

Eva

more : I could have them if I wished. How gladly I would have held it all to be deception ! And yet I told myself that it must be a far greater power which could resurrect the handkerchief again. But for that one needed the unknown word.

I carefully drew out the robe and began to drape it round me. As soon as its great folds with their sharp musty perfume rustled round me my confidence renewed itself. The old power surged up ; as if of themselves my hands made mysterious gestures. But before I grasped the staff I decided to invoke the ministering spirit. I mimicked my uncle's tones, put all my longing into my voice, and turning to the fire-place, called : " Amal ! Amal ! " Footsteps approached along the passage, a shudder ran through the room : but in through the half-open door stepped Eva. She remained standing for a little, then said with a laugh :

" What are you doing ? Throw away

A Childhood

that rubbish and come with me. We'll play at hide and seek in the passage."

"It isn't rubbish," I replied in exasperation. "You just wait till I find the magic word!"

"Do you still believe in that?" she asked in a maternal tone which only irritated me still more, so that I let the robe fall to the ground and went in silence to the window.

"It's only practice, quick fingers, clever juggling——"

"That isn't true!"

"But it is true. The only use of the magic word and the magic staff and the hocus-pocus is to make it all seem more wonderful to the audience, and to keep them from looking too attentively at your fingers."

I would have liked to ask her now how she had got the ring into the beaker, but I was afraid that I might be given a quite banal explanation, and remained silent. But she took up the staff, bowed towards

Eva

all sides, murmured something incomprehensible, and ended by saying with mock impressiveness :

“ Look me in the eye, ladies and gentlemen, and I’ll deceive you with my hands. Look at my hands, and I’ll deceive you with my eyes ”— at the same time putting on the same air as she had done in the inn, but exaggerating it until it became absurd, and breaking out suddenly into shrill laughter.

I realised that my faith was vanishing, and felt at the same time a violent hatred against my gratuitous enlightener, tore the staff from her, and struck her in the face. A red spot appeared on her brow, but she tried to smile and said :

“ Now you’ve struck me with the magic staff. That’s a terrible thing ! ”

Sobered and terrified at myself I threw the staff on the floor. But as if nothing had happened she drew me out into the passage and began very vigorously to tell me that the most important thing of all

A Childhood

was to become strong and supple. One must exercise one's muscles and sinews every day, she said, learn gymnastics, swimming, and even riding if possible ; for the horse was the loveliest creature, even as a baby she had always wished to be a horse.

"Can you do this?" she asked triumphantly, and so quickly that I could not grasp how one movement melted into the next, she cart-wheeled on her hands and feet along the whole passage, in through the open door of the room and back again, without once brushing the door-posts. Then she stood up again, tossed her hair back, put her arm round my neck, for she guessed at my dumb admiration, and said :

"You can learn it too !"

Suddenly my only desire was to be as clever and supple as she, and at once and without thinking I tried to throw a cart-wheel. It miscarried lamentably, and I was afraid that she would jeer at me ; but

Eva

she assured me seriously that at the start she had done no better. If I would leave myself completely in her hands and not try to do the hardest things first, then, so she said, she could make me better at it than she was herself. In her enthusiasm she rolled up her sleeves, bared her arm, bent it, made her biceps stand out, and commanded me to feel it : it was hard as iron.

“ That’s how your whole body must become ! ” she declared.

To keep my nose from being quite out of joint I told her about the dead arm which had terrified the maid so much that she had almost died, and offered to show it to her, an offer which, however, she showed not the slightest eagerness to accept. When she had gone I ran back to the room, flung the whole magical apparatus back pell-mell into the cupboard, kicked it in as far as I could with my foot, and vowed that I wouldn’t take it out again in a hurry.

A Childhood

Eva came to see us often now. My parents were very fond of her, particularly my father who, in spite of her freshness and suppleness of body, had doubts of the soundness of her health, and felt himself called upon to watch over it. From time to time he gave her a little bottle of reddish-brown liquid of which she had to swallow a dose daily. When the bottle was empty she presented herself again, was tapped and sounded, and given new medicine. Her gums were quite pale and there were hollows above her collar-bones, which in that part were called holy water cups ; these and other defects, as well as the frequent inflammation of her eyes, were to be gradually cured by the brown drops.

CHAPTER X

THE RACE

MY abortive appearance as a magician had not injured me in the least, thanks to Eva's intervention, with my schoolmates ; they did not look upon it as a failure, but were delighted that something had happened ; indeed some of them regarded me as an arch-magician, and were only surprised that I made such a modest use of my gifts. But I had not won any real estimation, and to Reisinger and his supporters I remained as before, partly uncanny, partly ridiculous. And yet I stuck obstinately to my efforts to be accepted by the native boys as one of themselves, even though Eva made fun of them, and spoke with boundless contempt of the dull-witted Kading crew. Once I was allowed to go and see a horse race at Landau on the Isar, and it gave me an

A Childhood

idea. Horse and sleigh racing always threw both old and young in Lower Bavaria into a state of excitement—if I were to arrange something of the kind, then in future no Kading boy could doubt my eligibility. The execution of the idea was simple, at least for me. The boys in my class were themselves to fill the rôle of the horses ; starting from our house they were three times to run round the market-place ; meanwhile, adorned with a silken scarf, I was to stand before the door, incite the runners flying past me, keep a strict eye upon them, and at last call out the winners and distribute the prizes. Eva entered into my plan with delight ; she suggested that I should make the dolts run until they dropped, but nevertheless agreed with me that the prizes must be very splendid. My mother too, who, on principle, usually had to refuse most of my requests and now wished to indemnify me amply, promised her help. The first prize, I decided, should be a silken banner with

The Race

white gold-tipped staves, to which my mother contributed a few coloured handkerchiefs, while I cut the remainder from the magic robe : the other prize-winners were to get banners made of coloured tissue paper, and these indeed seemed to me the more splendid ; for I gave up my most treasured things to embellish them, all the little gold-entwined pictures of saints, and the neatly cut-out rose-buds, clasped hands, and white doves with red sealed letters in their tiny beaks. To eke out the prizes, nickel coins, marbles, and the pretty beans which circulated among us children as a favourite means of exchange and barter came in very handy. My mother wished that no boy should go away from my treat with a grudge ; so she showed us how to construct gay rosettes somewhat like orders out of silver paper and gold tinsel, and in such number that everyone who did not carry off a banner could be adorned with one of those souvenirs.

A Childhood

Once more I fixed a placard to the door, this time with the announcement of the race, and hidden behind a curtain observed the effect. Many of the passers-by read it attentively. The grown-ups went on again smiling ; but the boys read it out aloud, discussed it heatedly, read it again, and considered it. This was enough to make me set to work feverishly. With my mother and my friend I sat almost every afternoon cutting out, sewing, clipping, gumming. Sometimes my father walked round the room admiring the half-finished banners and assuring me that if I needed money I could come to him. I ran to the Brothers Zettl, who played music in the market-place in addition to their tailoring, and instructed them to be present in good time at the race and to blow a flourish when each of the prizes was called out, as I had seen it done at Landau. They laughed heartily and asked who was to pay them, then, whereupon I responded that they only needed

The Race

to come and blow as hard as they could, for my father had lots of money.

One evening everything was finished and I arranged and examined the prizes, first with proud, then suddenly with uneasy feelings. For almost a week the school had been closed and I had hardly seen a single one of my mates ; separation and busy work, perhaps, too, the mysteriously crystallising effect of Eva's presence, had alienated me from my comrades and lulled to sleep any wish to play a rôle among them. The lovely standards lent the room a rainbow-like splendour ; orders, coins, marbles, and beans decked the table ; and I was to throw away all this self-created wealth on them ! A terrible, an incomprehensible demand from which with all my mind I strove to escape. When my mother said that she was looking forward to the boys' happy faces when they received their prizes, I felt dizzy ; I crept to bed with a heavy heart as if while dreaming I had contracted

A Childhood

foolish debts and now that I was awake would have to pay them. But next day the school opened again, and now I discovered the power of the community. With wild shouts the boys surrounded me as I was making shyly for my place, asked how high the money presents were, if there were among the marbles glass ones with tiny silver animals inside, if a flourish was actually to be blown, and if afterwards they were all to be given real chocolates and cakes. They were so candid and friendly in their boundless joy that my selfishness slipped from me again, and by the time that I went home I was so much one of them that I was willing to give them all the banners, even the silver-fringed banner in white and blue which my mother and Eva had sewed together for me so that I too should have a souvenir of the day.

This time, as so often, the preparations turned out to be the real treat. The race itself fizzled out like a rocket. It was a

The Race

mild Sunday in early winter. By two o'clock in the afternoon all the thirty-four competitors were gathered in front of the house, shouting, swaggering, darting about like hornets ; the citizens stood curiously before their doors and drew their children back so that nobody should run into them. The sun's rays picked out the trumpets and clarinettes ; the banners waved solemnly from our windows. When Eva saw that the beautiful one in white and blue was among them she grew troubled and asked whether it too was to be given as a prize. I answered that it was intended for the winner, whereupon she retorted vigorously :

“ The red silk one is quite good enough. The blue one is for you, and for nobody else.” A few boys heard this, among them Reisinger who had already noticed the splendid banner. He made to seize Eva by the hair, but she avoided him cleverly and said : “ Now I know what I'll do—I'll run myself and win the banner ! ”

A Childhood

Then all the boys raised a frightful cry that Eva Veeders was a shameless hussy, she didn't belong to Kading anyway, and I must at once forbid her to run. This demand was just enough ; I too felt that it was unbecoming for a girl to take part in a race. But because they held up against her the fact that she did not belong to Kading I was offended : it was the same trump-card that they were accustomed to play against me. I said : " Let her run ! Are you afraid that a girl will beat you ? "

Reisinger threw me a hostile glance ; he knew as well as I how well Eva could run. But now the trumpet blew : in a twinkling the dissension dropped and they all took their places in the line, so as not to miss the signal. Some were pale with excitement ; most of them stood with one foot out, their bodies leaning far forward, and their arms stretched back, so that the tense fingers of each seemed to be trying to keep his neighbour from making a

The Race

premature start. Reisinger darted an angry glance at Eva, who had laughingly taken up her position by his side ; I counted " One ! Two ! Three !" and the thirty-four broke loose, Eva with them.

When the runners flew past me the first time they were all holding tolerably together ; but soon several were left behind panting for breath, and forsook the field with an assumption of disdain. The third time they flew past there were only Eva, Reisinger, and another boy left to compete for the palm. Reisinger had already the same bluish tinge on his face as Uncle Georg had had in his attacks ; but Eva looked the same as ever, except that she was very pale and her nostrils were dilated ; her yellow sandals seemed to rebound from the earth ere they touched it ; it was a pleasure to watch her. Suddenly Reisinger was left behind, the other boy with him ; Eva finished as winner, having even overhauled a few of

A Childhood

the stragglers on the way. Almost choking for breath, Reisinger, summoning his last strength, cried that Eva's victory didn't count ; she had not run completely round the left corner in the lower market, but had cut off a good stretch of it. But then my father, who was standing up above in the window with my mother, declared in a decisive voice that Eva had held to the course as well as the others, and besides had gained such a lead that a few yards more or less did not matter. But Reisinger too had showed himself to be a splendid runner, indeed everybody had done his best, and after the presentation of the prizes all were heartily invited to come and have chocolates and cakes in the inn. So then, to the vigorous flourishing of trumpets, I handed my friend the lovely banner, which she accepted with a curtsy and thereupon turned to the window, repeating the curtsy and sinking the banner. Reisinger was now content with his too, indeed soon found it to be finer

The Race

than the other : he counted his prize-money, holding the banner between his knees, and stuck it in a leather purse which he encircled several times with a long cord. The musicians were not niggardly with their art, and provided a flourish for the last of the competitors as for the first. Those who had made little headway in the running consoled themselves with the thought of the fine rosettes which were to be distributed in the inn. The room was the same one where I had given such a bad display of magic, but no one thought of that now. With the eating and drinking the merriment grew ; amid a wild tumult the winners compared and appraised their trophies, and those who were empty-handed explained at length what had kept them from running as fast as usual to-day. Soon the talk turned to a new theme. It was said that a great many new houses were to be built, and even that one day Kading would be called a town, like Dingolfing or Landau. But we boys,

A Childhood

one of us said, would have to do our part too, would have to erect houses, one a month at the very least, even if it were only wooden ones : we should start the very next day. Then a fair boy who was usually shy lifted his soft voice ; he thought that that would be far too slow, we Kading lads should make helmets and swords for ourselves, declare war on the boys of Waibling and Goben, take them prisoners, and compel them to settle round Kading ; then we would be as big as Straubing, and, who knows, might even become the capital of Bavaria. This barbarous proposal dumbfounded most of the boys ; one of them remembered that in Goben there were very strong boys whom it wouldn't be so very easy to conquer ; others tried to shout him down, hidden enmities flashed out, suddenly two boys advanced on each other swinging their prize banners, nothing else being available ; a fight seemed unavoidable—when, at the critical moment, the maid appeared with a shallow basket

The Race

full of the beautiful glittering rosettes, everything became still, the combatants fell silent with curiosity, and I set about the distribution at once. Then as if by a magical formula the dissension vanished ; a quiet cheerfulness ruled again, and those who had wanted a moment before to attack each other now lovingly fastened the pretty rosettes to each other's jacket. Indeed as soon as one of them had a brilliant rosette in the form of a cross or a star in his buttonhole something seemed to happen to him ; for the moment he considered himself singled out for greater distinction than all the others, acquired dignity, and pulled himself together.

Finally there was nothing left but for each to evince a certain respect for his neighbour, by means of which their rowdiness cleared away and a chastened mood arose which was very congenial to me. For in me too something was happening, and now that I was almost on the point of achieving at last the real respect

A Childhood

of my schoolmates, I had begun to withdraw from them for good. That morning I had seen the Christmas manger in the church for the first time, and now from hour to hour the desire was mastering me to copy at home the sacred scene and landscape. I did not yet see how it was to be done ; it was still only my fantasy that was devoutly spying out its plunder in a whole world of possible transformations, and suddenly rejected as trivial the mania for power and honour. More and more the jollity round me seemed to me friendly but alien, and I did not at once understand even Eva when she suddenly drew me aside, pushed the lovely white and blue banner into my hands, and whispered passionately : “ You have it now ! Never give it away again ! ”

CHAPTER XI

THE MANGER

WHY are we so delighted with the boy who wilfully begins one work after another, now a house, now a ship, now a bridge, yet never remains constant to the finished thing, but smashes it at once and starts on something new? We are delighted because we divine the constant meaning in this inconstancy. We believe in the spirit, ever becoming, ever creating, ever manifesting itself. It slips into many cloaks, informing them with its own shape, so that it may grow for a while unnoticed. When the growth is accomplished, when the new stage is reached, it withdraws again from the outward husk of its last development, tossing that aside, and changes into the next.

The manger grew slowly. A broad window-sill had been reserved for me ;

A Childhood

but a week passed and still all that lay there were a few bits of wood, some moss, and the glittering splinter of granite which, believing it possessed untold value, I had taken with me when we left Königsdorf.

After long brooding it became clear to me that first of all the sky and the mountains must be fashioned. In one of my mother's cupboards there were great rolls of thin paper of a transparent remote light blue ; with these I shut off the upper part of the window and fashioned a dim religious shade which down below was darkened by bluish-grey cardboard mountains into a background of deepest night. The mountains in the foreground were more palpable : indurated tree fungi on which little houses and trees could quite well be fixed. Amid the fungi stood the granite splinter ; in it I saw the centre of gravity and the magnetic secret of the landscape, but this I divulged to nobody. Slender forests of tiny fir twigs indicated the transition from the high

The Manger

lands to the plain. To prepare my soil worthily I peeled the bark from the damp wood which the maid bore in for the fire, pressed the pieces flat, and laid them side by side ; some were decorated with curly or antler-branched mosses, many were covered with fine fungi-like verdigris.

Soon a roughly made stall and manger stood in the foreground ; but then the execution of the plan came to a standstill, for many things were wanting which it was not easy to procure. And now I began with the complacent zeal of a magpie to purloin everything which looked as if it might suit my purpose : fragments of glass, pebbles, and coloured stuffs ; a farmer's son who sat in front of me at school had even to submit while I unravelled as much coloured worsted as would come out of his thick black and red striped winter jersey. As he turned round in surprise I whispered to him that the cradle of the Christ Child was to be lined with it ; very good-humouredly he let me

A Childhood

go on pulling, and next day he even brought me a blue jay's wing ; I should deck the three holy kings with it, he said. Where I was to get kings, however, where indeed I was to get human figures at all, I did not know, but trusted that they would arrive at the right time. The cook had insulted me deeply by advising me to cut out pictures and gum them on boards. For I yearned for concrete figures, not for painted paper ones which would embarrass me when anyone wanted to look at them from the side or from behind. From now on I became mistrustful of outside help, and when anyone wanted to press advice on me I simply drew the great yellow window curtains together behind me and made both my work and myself invisible.

But as soon as one's spirit is directed to a goal many things come out to meet it ; distant thoughts and things desert their orbits and hasten towards it. Suddenly I remembered the nameless plants which grew in the corner of the garden ; I ran

The Manger

down and saw that they were still green ; indeed I had at once divined something of the evergreen in them. The stems were stronger, the leaves stiffer, the forks grown into eye-shaped little bunches ; the palm form was undeniable. It was not easy to dig them up by the roots from the frozen ground, but in return how sacredly strange did they make my landscape !

Next morning the peasant who had had that accident arrived to pay my father his account, showed his healed arm, called me in, and set down on the table a little waggon with a covered top, as well as some beautifully carved wooden sheep, horses, and other animals. " That's for the skin that cured me," he laughed, clapping me on the shoulder ; but I took all those splendid things bought with my own flesh and blood and with a good conscience set them up in my manger.

In an old legend it is told that at Jesus' birth the Enemy, filled with rage and terror at the approaching end of his reign,

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crept away whimpering and howling and hid himself in the innermost corner of Hell. This scene was perfectly clear to me. I had a wooden Kasperl¹ ; nothing was easier than to turn him into a devil, and in this my friend the bat, which had been floating uselessly for so long in spirits, was put to an honourable use. Its wings were snipped off straightway, the thin elastic integument stretched as far as it would reach, and stitched on to Satan's uniform composed of the remnants of the magic robe ; but what remained of the bat, now only an ordinary mouse, was burned. Beneath the window-sill there was let into the wall a little tin vessel to catch the rain-water ; it could be pulled out by a porcelain knob, whereupon an uncannily dark cavity appeared. To this hole the arch-fiend was consigned ; here in the darkness he crouched away from the splendour of salvation, and with

¹ The German version of Punch in the Punch and Judy Shows.

The Manger

reddened eyes and pointed scarlet tongue grinned upwards.

So the Evil One was fashioned ; but the Saints, and the divine Child, where was the material for these ? I knew that the lovely serious faces in the church were made of wax, and now I asked my mother to give me the pure beeswax which had been given me by our neighbour's children ; it seemed to me sufficient to serve for the Christ Child, Mary, Joseph, and the Kings. One day I took courage and tried to mould Mary's face, which hovered in my mind as a form of ineffable holiness. But now a terrible time began. True, I was not more inexpert than a boy of nine years might expect to be, and the shapes that grew beneath my fingers roughly suggested the human face ; but of the blessedness which had enraptured and uplifted me in my models I captured not a trace. At first I noticed with uneasiness that the wax did not maintain for long its soft whiteness, but degenerated more and more to a dirty

A Childhood

grey. But what terrified me, as if it were the agency of a hostile power, was the base and hideous expressions with which my puppets leered at me, no matter from what side I looked at them. The more I strove to endow them with a pious and gracious nature, the more they deteriorated under my hands into hags and gallows-birds. Suddenly I flung all the heads I had begun on the floor and fell into such a fury of sobbing that in alarm my mother rushed in. She saw that blood was running down from my temple, and asked what was wrong. Now I noticed myself for the first time that in my rage I had scratched my face with my nails. I did not reply, but got up and gave myself up to another bout of sobbing. She did not question me further. The misshapen bogies which she saw lying about told her enough. She took up a few of the unfortunate little heads in her hand, regarded them smilingly, put them away again, and washed the blood from my face. Thereupon she asked me

The Manger

how far on I was with my home lessons. When she saw that in spite of the late hour I had never given them a thought she said to me :

“This is a hallowed time. Do your work faithfully during the week, and Sunday will bring you something !” and she left the room.

It had sounded like a prophecy ; I suddenly felt an inner certainty that something would happen to help me, and returned comforted to my lessons, and from then on too I began again to play more often in the street, and contented myself with putting little touches to my landscape.

But the week was long, and early on Wednesday morning I dreamt that I saw Uncle Georg walking across my bedroom. He was wearing the magic robe, out of which great patches had been cut. In his hand he held one of the porcelain basins in which my father was accustomed to mix his salves, came with it up to me, and

A Childhood

said : “ Are you there, Master Sculptor ? ” then took two or three lumps of a reddish-white stuff out of the basin, gave them to me, and ordered me to make a beautiful child out of them, whereupon he disappeared through the door. I kneaded away at the stuff for a while and suddenly held a marvellously beautiful mannikin in my hand. Awakening at that very moment I saw that the fire was already kindled, sprang with one bound out of bed, seized the rest of the wax, which was lying on the window-ledge, and knelt down in the glow from the fire, full of faith that awake I must succeed in doing what I had done so easily while asleep. In my finger-tips I still felt the shaping motions of my dream, from the stove came a strong warm breath which helped to soften the wax, and the thing which resulted in a few minutes, if it was not beautiful, was yet a clear and agreeable little face ; I only needed to cover the head with some brown wool, pick out the eyes, lips, and nostrils, and

The Manger

tint the cheeks with two drops of red wine, and it could pass quite well for a young shepherd.

I wakened my father and mother, and in the afternoon fetched Eva as well, to show her the first self-created human figure which I would acknowledge as mine. She found that it wasn't at all bad ; only the clothes and the hat seemed to disappoint her ; she pulled them this way and that, then took needle and thread and soon had everything fitted and sewn so cleverly that I could not but praise it. So my resolve to do everything myself was graciously broken down, and thenceforth I hesitated less and less to accept help from others.

When Eva had gone my parents talked about her. My mother praised her increasingly serious and independent character, my father the clear decision of her face which was gradually ripening into beauty, not omitting by the way to ascribe the child's fortunate development in part to his treatment ; true, he said, a

A Childhood

doctor could not make a beautiful human being out of an ugly one, but perhaps now and then by certain purifying means he could set free an imprisoned loveliness.

We had decided to meet again every day, yet not to start anything new, but await the Sunday miracle, when the Friday involved me in an incident which made all my hopes very uncertain. For during the midday pause I quarrelled with Reisinger at marbles, and indeed far more badly than ever before. Before my entry into the game he had enjoyed unusual good luck and had uninterruptedly won one throw after another, but from the moment that I came in he fell into an equally stubborn losing vein, and, pale with vexation, saw his booty of glass and coloured marbles vanish into my pockets. Suddenly he broke off, called me a cheat, and repeated again his old reproach that I had diddled him out of the first prize at the race for Eva's sake, and added that I should be ashamed of always going about

The Manger

with a girl, and an interloper at that. I felt the injustice of these reproaches, and the hostility which lay behind them ; but while I was confusedly seeking for a reply the school-bell rang. The teacher was already sitting at his desk ; the lesson began ; but I was incapable of following it. Filled with shame and rage I broke my slate pencils, bent my pen nibs, and then scribbled absently on my slate, which composed me somewhat. And suddenly I had begun to sketch the face of my enemy. I had a very soft slate pencil, which glided easily and smoothly over the slate and seemed to follow out its own course, and as if an evil spirit guided my hand, I had involuntarily caught in a few lines, though I had no knowledge of drawing, the irregular features, the left eye higher than the right, the misshapen ears, and the twisted chin. After the last touch had been added I turned the slate so that everybody could see the picture. Presently I could feel the bench behind me shaking

A Childhood

with suppressed laughter ; but Reisinger started violently, his mouth took on a terrible expression, I recognised what I had done, and wiped out my wretched work.

After the school was dismissed I could easily have escaped trouble for the time being by running home as fast as I could ; but as if of themselves my feet led me quite slowly by a roundabout way where anybody could overtake me. With a hoarse " Now I've got you ! " he stood at last before me in all his superior strength. " You take care ! " This was the only retort I could summon. He looked at me a little in surprise, spat, then suddenly seized the arm I had raised in defence, and with a mock superior air began to crush my wrist between his hard fingers, a game called by us schoolboys " fitting gloves." I declared that I did not feel anything ; he only laughed and deepened my anguish by remaining uncannily silent, calmly and dumbly enjoying his revenge.

The Manger

Now I let fly at him with my free hand, and got in some shrewd blows, but I felt more and more that his strength and size were far too great for me. Besides this, I was lamed by a feeling that came from within myself, a strange sadness out of which bit by bit arose a sort of sympathy for my enemy, who looked terribly pale and ill and yet quietly went on torturing my wrist until the unbearable pang at last lent me the strength to free it from his clasp with a doubly painful wrench. I saw near me the half-open door of a house and sprang inside and without knocking ran into the kitchen, whose friendly occupant sheltered the fugitive until his tormentor had taken himself off.

CHAPTER XII

REVENGE

HAVING reached the house unmolested I found that I had it to myself, and went over to the manger as usual, but left it again immediately, and leaning against the almost cold stove, remained sunk in thought. There was a knock ; Eva came in. She was wearing a new dark blue cloak, and round her neck was a white wrap whose long ends hung down. I avoided her eyes and tried to conceal my swollen hand ; but she had already seen it and of herself guessed at the perpetrator. " Reisinger ? " she asked darkly, taking my wrist in both her hands and blowing on it as one blows on a hot dish. Thereupon she dipped her handkerchief in cold water and made a bandage for me. Then she asked if I was cold, said that she was hot herself, took off her cloak,

Revenge

and argued with me until I slipped into it. It fell down to my ankles ; my hands were almost covered by the sleeves. We leant together against a window-ledge and stared down into the market-place. Eva told me that half an hour before she had seen my mother going towards the priest's house, whereupon I suggested that it had been probably to see whether the dead arm should be buried.

"What was it your cook did that time?" asked my friend. "Did she really almost die of fright?" and I told once more how she had become white as chalk and sunk against the wall.

"I would do just the same, I would fall dead on the spot!" replied Eva without looking at me, adding after a short pause: "If he were to see it quite suddenly, Reisinger, I mean,—don't you think he would be pretty frightened too?"

At these words my grief changed into wild joy. Again I saw the maid leaning against the wall, her mouth and eyes wide

A Childhood

open, while spoons and cups clattered to the floor ; and at the idea that Reisinger would look just as terrified, that he would stagger back in just the same way, I forgot my shame and pain. I saw the scene quite clearly. " Shall I fetch it ? It won't hurt you," I cried, springing up, and ran into the passage, convinced myself that there was nobody in the kitchen, and felt my way upstairs through the darkness until I found the chest. When I returned to the living-room Eva cried with averted face : " Have you got it ? Splendid. Lay it behind there in that corner. Do, please ! "

" Why, are you frightened ? "

" No, no," she cried, trembling in every limb.

" What is there about it to be afraid of ? " I asked, and I explained what bones, joints, sinews, and muscles were, and that doctors had to study arms like this for years so that they might be able to cure people.

Suddenly she decided to take a short

Revenge

glance, but immediately turned away again, covering her eyes with her hands.

"When are you going to do it?" she asked quite calmly after a while.

"At half-past four, when he's fetching his father's beer."

We gazed out again, but then suddenly started back. His hands in his trouser pockets, now and then standing still, Reisinger was sauntering up very slowly from the lower market.

"There he is," whispered Eva. Now I grasped the mummied arm, held it up diagonally, and walked with it backwards and forwards before the mirror.

"Let me keep on your cloak, Eva," I cried. "I look terribly tall in it; he won't know who I am."

"Yes, keep it on," a little less frightened already, she encouraged me, "and come here, I'll bind my wrap round your face! This is chiffon, you know, chiffon that belonged to my mother, it's very fine stuff. . . . You can see everything through

A Childhood

it, like a screen, but nobody can make you out. . . . But hurry ! . . . He'll think you're a ghost"—whereupon she carefully wound the soft white fabric round my head, I lifted the fearful arm, essayed a few solemn steps, and regarded myself in the mirror, which powerfully corroborated the gruesome impression that I hoped to produce.

"I'll go quite slowly up to him like a spirit !" I said.

"Yes, quite slowly," repeated Eva, "only don't wait any longer ! He's at the post office already. Don't be afraid. I'll be near. I have a knife and I'll stab him in the hand if he does anything to you."

It was as the twilight was beginning to fall that I walked out into the almost empty market-place. I held the dead arm in such a way that it only swung a very little and looked like a gruesome extension of my own outstretched arm. With a trailing gait I advanced towards Reisinger, filled completely with my task of being a

Revenge

ghost, and keeping a sharp eye on my unconscious enemy at the same time. When he caught sight of the apparition he remained standing and smiled, a blissful credulous smile, as if a very beautiful vision had risen before him. But already the outstretched grey hand was almost upon him, already it was feeling at his forehead, when with a gurgling cry he fell backwards and began to twitch and fling his limbs about. And as if all the people had been waiting for this, doors and windows opened everywhere, great and small hastened up and looked now at the victim, now at the doer and his ghastly weapon. But, delighted at first by the prompt effect of the surprise, I now stood of a sudden terrified and sobered. My first impulse was to fly ; then I wanted to confess my guilt before the people standing round, but at the same time I thought of my father and my mother, and this awoke in me a desire for action. I threw down the dead arm, tore the veil from my

A Childhood

face, called the unconscious boy by his name, shook him by the shoulders, and went on assuring him earnestly that it was only bones, joints, muscles, and sinews, that was all. An old woman brought hot coffee ; she said that she had known the boy since his childhood, and that he had had fits like this when he was young. These words reassured me somewhat ; I knelt down to feel the sufferer's pulse as I had often seen it done at home, and assured the people present, who were not yet in a position to understand the occurrence so well, that things would be better presently.

At that moment I heard the familiar high jingling of my father's carriage which, returning from its round of the villages, was comfortably rolling into the market-place. Reisinger's mother, fetched by some of the children, had just arrived with a hand-barrow and several pillows ; she ran up to the carriage and begged my father to get down. My father glanced

Revenge

first at myself and the arm and then bent over Reisinger, at the corners of whose lips a little white foam was showing. After a hasty examination he ordered the boy to be taken home without delay and promised to follow. With the help of one or two men the mother arranged her son comfortably on the hand-barrow and began to pull it, a child with a lantern lighting her way. I stood aside, awaiting my interrogation and sentence, but only received the brusque command to give the arm to the coachman and to go home at once, whereupon my father followed the unlucky procession. This humiliating dismissal while the other, unapproachable as the dying, travelled away from me into night and destiny, illumined my situation with a terrifying clarity. It was in vain that Eva, who walked unmoved by my side, said that the good God had punished Reisinger, in vain that she counted up all the things he had done to me—these had no weight now. I saw the fallen boy lying

A Childhood

in the dust and his face taking on a dark and strange beauty before which I felt annulled. The windows of my parents' house had an alien and menacing gleam, and as the first snow began to fall, to me it seemed that it was falling on everyone but myself alone.

CHAPTER XIII

THE LIGHT GIVER

AS before thawing weather the air suddenly grows strangely transparent and all things become clear, so the approach of sickness often lifts us into an exquisitely pure mood in which we are boundlessly sensitive to every light and shadow of existence. My mother had threatened me with severe punishments ; but next day nothing more was said of them ; it was as if everybody had agreed not to mention the occurrence before me. I divined in this the cruel wisdom of my father, who could regard it as a sufficient punishment to leave me to my own thoughts. Yet the general silence made me so shy and tongue-tied that I could not bring myself to ask after Reisinger, and as the school was closed because of an epidemic of scarlet fever and I was

A Childhood

confined to the house and the living-room, and Eva too did not come, I remained in ignorance of the effects of my action. To pass these dull days I sought anew to improve my manger landscape, and so fell completely again under the spell of my unfinished creation. But I was careful not to touch the wax, fearing that once more devils and witches might come to light. And yet my thoughts soon circled again, capriciously and idly, round the holy figures which were still lacking. I thought more and more infrequently of what had happened. Often I remembered the rose-coloured Christ Child which I knew was shut in the waxen book ; it would have been just right for my purpose. Once as I was going to sleep I saw it gleaming upon the quilt, so palpable that I could have seized it, and made to catch it as if it were a butterfly, but then it vanished. Simply to ask my mother for it seemed to me at times a very easy matter ; but then I struck against her

The Light Giver

changed attitude to me and remained silent. Sunday was past, the miracle had not come, everything seemed ruined. But in the window the snow grew like a promise ; if I gazed fixedly for a while into the tranquillising whiteness I felt the tiny Biblical figures quite near me ; they might appear at any moment.

It was the fourth night after that fateful evening, and I was lying in my first profound sleep, when our bell rang so persistently that I became wide awake. Though this peal which was only intended for my father had never excited me before when I chanced to hear it, to-night, perhaps frightened already by a dream, I listened to it with terror and felt certain that it was for me. I thought that Reisinger was dead and that the gendarmes were standing outside to carry me to Landau prison, whither, as I knew quite well, all the Kading malefactors were taken first. While with the calmness of despair I was getting my clothes together

A Childhood

in the clear moonlight, my father, already in overcoat and hat, came in with a candle, and without paying any attention to me, hurried out through my room into the passage. There I heard the sound of many voices. I put on my clothes and crept out. Putting his bandage case in order my father was standing in the midst of a crowd of people who were crying, sobbing, and wringing their hands. He must come at once, they said, the carpenter Schmerold had stabbed his wife in the inn as she was trying to drag him away from a brawl. The knife which he had aimed originally at another man had slipped and gone in under her left breast, she would soon be cold, she gave no sign of life although they had poured as much Schnapps as they could down her throat.

My father took up his case and followed the hurrying crowd over the yard bright with snow and moonlight. My presence was not noticed by him, or if noticed suffered in silence. As soon as I was

The Light Giver

certain that the whole affair had nothing to do with me, my tension dissolved into a shivering fit of internal laughter which suddenly turned into a short bout of weeping, by which the neighbouring women who were hurrying along with us were deeply touched, because they thought that it was the fate of poor Frau Schmerold that I was taking so much to heart. They comforted me and said that Frau Schmerold should be glad to be set free from her husband, the wicked rascal ; everybody in Kading knew that he took up with other women, it was certain that he had thought out the murder for a long time, but now he would make out that it had been committed when he was mad with drink, in which case he would, worse luck, only get a few years' imprisonment.

I soon escaped from the women and was among the first to reach the familiar room. On the long table which had once been covered with my magic paraphernalia lay

A Childhood

the young woman. Her black head-cloth had slipped far back from her brow ; one could see her neatly combed light blonde hair ; the eyes were open and turned in a little. Over the edge of the table hung a hand with a slender ring, her feet were resting on an overturned quart mug, a frothy mixture of blood and beer dripped on to the stone floor.

My father quickly uncovered her breast, and everybody pressed forward to see the knife wound. It did not look in the least dangerous ; it was almost closed and only bled a little now. Every one acted as if he still hoped, and perhaps because even in the most hopeless cases one expects at least some action from a doctor, my father had the dead woman's legs raised higher, and drew ether into a metal syringe and injected it through a hollow needle under the skin. Thereupon at regular intervals he raised her slack arms and brought them down again on her breast, at which a soft cooing breath was driven from her throat,

The Light Giver

so that already I believed that life was returning.

The time passed, the lamp went out, the landlady lit a candle and put it into the hand of one of the onlookers, so that he might give light. He was a powerful man who, it was whispered, had himself taken part in the fight, but he was soon overcome, his face became white as the dead woman's, and reeling back he gave up the light to another man and disappeared. After a short attempt to stand fast the second man fared no better; already I noticed that with a white face he was looking around for a third helper—then I took heart, stepped forward, gripped the candle-stick with both hands, raised it as high as I could, and vowed to persevere, no matter how long it lasted. But soon weariness began to weigh upon my arms, the temptation to let them sink became overpowering—then I remembered Ludwig the Second, who once by his endurance in bearing a candle had thrown that sick

A Childhood

young man into such admiration. The King had since been drowned in the Starnbergersee and I had forgotten him ; now he arose again, refreshed me by his example, and gave me strength. Growing rigid in my task as Light Giver, soon I no longer felt any pain, and kept gazing only at the dead woman, at her eyes, which the good landlady had meanwhile closed, at the face with its look of comfort and of acquiescence in everything, at the breast which was the only part of her that still seemed to be alive.

As I was returning home with my father I asked myself whether he had taken a little notice perhaps of my faith and endurance. It would have gladdened me greatly ; for I knew that I was still in a state of guilt and disgrace. But, occupied by his own thoughts, he seemed to notice me first when I was wishing him good night, and only asked me whether I had clothed myself warmly, then, however, added in a friendly voice that Reisinger

The Light Giver

was getting better, but that Eva had fallen ill, though not dangerously.

Next day towards evening I could not endure the living-room any longer, went out to the garden, entered it, and stamped through my mother's snow-covered domain. In my beloved nook the stalks of the sun-flowers, which once I had helped to train from tiny green shoots to their golden majesty, were broken short, the wild vines were covered with black frozen clusters, and everywhere rose rime flowers which on being plucked dissolved like phantoms. And there too in the tangle of stems lay my ball, which I had once thrown at the magician. I rubbed off the snow, nothing was left of the blue colouring with the silver stars, but the ball was still hard and filled with air. I threw it up and caught it again, and, elated by the unexpected find, returned to the house, where, feeling slightly unwell, I took off my clothes and went to bed. A fever may lurk in the blood for

A Childhood

several days ; now as soon as I lay quietly beneath the blankets it began to work itself out. I shivered violently and had wonderful visions, whose memory still remains partially with me. Very tall in his robe and cap my Uncle Georg stood behind the stove and winked merrily at me. But I lay as the dead lie, bedecked with the silk flowers which he had conjured out of my pockets in the night before he died, and seemed under a strong necessity not to move, until suddenly I felt the ball in my hand—then I flung it to the magician. In exchange he threw me his staff, and indeed so skilfully that it was in my hand at once. By turning it this way or that I could raise myself in the air, now fast, now slowly, according as I held it straight or at a slant. Finally I seemed to find the correct grip, for I flew upwards with furious speed. But then I must have turned it the wrong way ; for with horrible rapidity I fell towards the earth again. Everything grew very clear to me ; I

The Light Giver

expected every moment to be smashed to pieces, and in my terror opened my eyes wide—but my father was standing by my bed with a lamp, beside him my mother, and both were regarding me attentively.

CHAPTER XIV

ILLNESS

FIRST weeks of illness ! Where suffering engenders growth, where in a protective stupor the senses round themselves, where at times in the sweat of weakness the lightning of the future flashes and the boy uncertainly awaits the coming of visions or of a beatifying call !

A silence full of meaning is drawn round us then, every voice has a new reverberation, the clock ticks more loudly and quickly than usual, each cupboard, each table loses all that is accidental to it, and the jacket and stockings which hang beside us over the chair assume as soon as it begins to grow dark a touching semblance of our own postures.

Once, when my eyes had grown clearer again, I found a gaily decked and lighted fir tree standing in the room ; but it was

Illness

to the manger that my mother pointed. From the long since prepared moss and worsted cradle shone the Christ Child out of the waxen book ; Mother Mary with her fair hair and Father Joseph, grey and anxious, leant over it ; shepherds with the firm step of mountaineers stalked towards Bethlehem, angels sparkled on the mountains, and with hands nobly cupped the Kings proffered their gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Everything was fulfilled, and the boy did not think of asking whence the figures had come. They stood before him, the crystal-clear creations of his longing ; so without reflection he claimed them as his own. Soon he even ventured to touch them, a deep pleasure, particularly when he fingered Mary's red gown, only a little of which showed beneath the blue robe. It was of the deep red of the vervain and it felt as if between the stuff and his fingers there were also an indescribably fine other material, which he could neither see nor squeeze away.

A Childhood

Again and again, however, his glance turned to the young shepherd fashioned half in dream, and oftener still to Satan ; for he too was his own handiwork, and had comforted him—how often !—with his infernal immaculateness when the blessed figures were still wanting and the manger was still so empty. At last he felt sorry for the hideous outlaw ; he took him up and set him on the granite pyramid, where, beneath the shade of palms, he looked princely and sad rather than ugly and malignant. Gradually the boy's soul attained a height whence it could survey the whole as a unity. And now he saw that it was indeed a whole, with its own laws and its own light. A greenish twilight graciously enclosed everything ; cleft and fissure sparkled with hidden metals ; and from the nearest moss to the foot of the mountains stretched a distance of many hours. But supremely consoling was the unreality, the immutability of that gentle world. Never would that child be cruci-

Illness

fied ; never would those angels fly away ; and the star would never set.

I learned that Eva was still sick ; Reisinger, however, my mother said, was getting on well, but he was not much in the streets, for he had to be busy helping his father in his joiner's work-shop. This news comforted and excited me at the same time ; my head grew hot again, my hands huge and light, the air clung like cotton wool round my fingers, and to look at the manger was a pain. Finally I pressed my head down on the pillows and closing my eyes gave myself up to the darkness ; but there too there was no surcease, no vacancy. A black whirl perpetually washed up and down queer curly objects ; bands, twigs, halves of rings, halves of eyes, dull-coloured snail spirals. But I had to be careful not to fix my gaze upon any given point but rather to let the apparitions simply float away, otherwise everything crumbled to a reddish-green dust. Very lovely was one

A Childhood

mirage, which came but seldom, yet afterwards recurred so regularly that soon like a star-gazer I could tell its phases beforehand. In the deeps appeared the vague shape of a comet which flung upwards great bluish-golden bubbles that suddenly broke and scattered harvests of threads, little balls, leaves, and fins, whereupon the whole melted to a black vacancy. Then I had only to wait quietly for the appearance of a glittering brazen wheel which enclosed a five-rayed golden star and following an elliptic course vanished with it.

So my soul, loosened from its bearings by my fever, found itself strangely swept to and fro between everything and nothing. But then followed moments of absolute ennui, and with them an extreme discomfort which neither books nor play could assuage. Everyone knows of those childish states, where outwardly we present a fretfully cross and sullen appearance, while underneath many matters are being

Illness

decided, and for the first time a divination dawns that in the last and deepest things nobody can help us. No other longing is nearer the fountain head, none more beset with dangers than that of the inexperienced child as yet unconscious of his sex, who in the intoxication of recovery, cut off from his comrades, lies awake in his bed. He cannot like his healthy playmates give expression to his waxing strength in pranks and shouting ; he cannot like the grown-ups translate it into action, or throw it into an embrace ; he must feel and endure it in all its divine incompatibility, must grow along with it or break upon it. And all at once the boy yearns for someone, perhaps for a comrade, perhaps for a leader or a misleader ; it is neither woman nor man that hovers before his mind, but it must be a being who will throw open for him an incomparably greater existence than he has lived hitherto, and he is willing for its sake to take upon himself the greatest sufferings. But finally good dreams lead

A Childhood

him back once more to the marble angel which he knew, and as once he had embraced animals without fear of their horns and claws, so now in spirit he kisses the brow and lips of the seraph, at the risk that it might suddenly come to life and destroy him in a blaze of glory.

Those to whom this and many other things in our story may sound odd, should hope with us for more enlightened ages where no child need be under the necessity of following a marble leader. The times of solitary vagabondage, we are told, are now coming to an end. The single Light of the World will shine forth, with not a ray lacking from its lustre ; nature will commune with nature by the shortest path, and every separate form will be seen and interpreted at once in the universal spirit. Magical words have lost their spell, the dæmons are overcome. The boy will wander no more at large ; as a unit of determinable force he will early ally himself with other forces.

Illness

So runs the prophecy. But we, sons of the twilight, faithfully serve the darkness no less than the light. What the temples of the coming spirit will be like, how high they will rise, and who will complete them, nobody knows. We ourselves shall never set foot in them ; but if we were boys still we should take our piece of sparkling granite, bear it by night to the building place, and bury it secretly under the foundation-stone. What harm could it do to the walls ?

One day my father divulged to me that in a few months I was to be sent to the gymnasium in Landshut, and that as soon as I was recovered I must go to the priest, who would prepare me for my new school. Thereupon, half in jest, he laid a Latin grammar on the bed. I set about learning it, and found it far easier than I had expected. Soon I was able to put together short sentences, and as I recited these to myself with many variations my blood grew calmer and my dull brain lighter.

A Childhood

At last Eva arrived bringing snowdrops and urging me to get up. She had grown pale, tall, and womanlike, and some time had to elapse ere I could feel the same towards her as before. She sighed often ; then humming to herself she circled round the room in a strange dance movement ; the walls seemed to ring, and when she was finished, to go on trembling still for a few seconds.

When I began to boast mildly about my Latin and my future in the town she listened quietly, but then told me that she too had come to the end of her stay in Kading, a brother of her dead mother had visited her, he wanted to take her to Munich soon and train her as a trick equestrienne. She was to be given a white horse to ride on and a blue-green silk costume with countless little sequins sewed to it. But she didn't want all that, what she wanted was to become a dancer. "And I'll manage it too," she said.

Illness

“ But you always used to want to ride,”
I threw in.

“ When I was young I often wanted to be a white horse. After that I wanted to ride on one. But now I want to dance ! ”

To my question, where had she learned it, she said it had been somewhat the same as myself with my wax figures. Her mother had appeared to her in a dream, young and merry as a girl, and had taken her by the hand and danced ; it hadn't been in the least frightening, but very solemn. Since then she had been able to do nothing but think of dances, every day she thought of new ones, and though she had not managed yet to recreate the dance in the dream, it would come to her some day. Thereupon she began again to float lightly and surely round the room. I looked on with delight ; the last remnant of my inner discomfort was gone ; for the first time I felt renewed health in all my limbs.

A Childhood

But the rhythm of those lovely movements went on working in me afterwards like a good piece of news. And as life itself now promised to grow spacious and ethereal, insensibly the manger lost its value and its magic. I looked at it less and less, and let it crumble away on the window-sill. And the little composition fell very quickly to pieces once my affection no longer held it together. The peaks of the mountains loosened, the palms withered, the Kings' crowns broke, Satan's wings caved in, and the fallen shepherds and beasts sank deep into the yellowing moss.

CHAPTER XV

THE OFFERING

ONCE I had a comic morning dream. I saw my shoes peeping out from under the closed door of my room ; then they tapped busily over the floor towards my bed, where they presented themselves to me side by side and shining. Wakening at once I remembered that this was the day on which I had to visit the priest, leapt over to the toilet table, and after breakfast set out. On my way I passed Reisinger's house, but only became aware of this when I noticed Reisinger himself busy at something behind a half-open window. Already flying from the place in thought I remained nevertheless quietly standing, and told myself immediately, moreover, that it was quite in order for me to meet him now. He was in his shirt-sleeves and wore a blue apron, and was

A Childhood

trying to dovetail two white boards together, meanwhile holding a pencil between his teeth. I noticed a change in him which I could not decipher, but felt to be propitious. When he caught sight of me he drew back a little, but then said in a perfectly friendly voice, almost as if he had been expecting me : " Is that you ? " and added : " Come inside."

It was the first time that I had set foot inside the bare little workshop where father and son were now working. While he was polishing one of the boards with a sand-paper, Reisinger asked without looking at me : " Are you quite better again ? " " Yes, and yourself ? " I replied quickly, whereupon he declared defensively that nothing very much had been the matter with him, only his nerves, and besides ever since he had been in far better health than before ; my father allowed him to drink nothing but milk, and that did him good. It was almost as if he were ashamed of his stroke, and he let it be clearly seen that he

The Offering

considered my illness the more serious of the two. Our talk was interrupted now : the boy flung himself passionately into his work again, and I stood unregarded, somewhat embarrassed by the silent presence of the father, whose face did not betray whether he was about to fling me out or was prepared to suffer my stay a little longer. The taciturn man, who on the street resembled a surly beggar, towered here in all the dignity of a master, congruous and honourable among the cupboards, tables, and coffins which he himself had made. With deliberation he laid his measuring rod to a board, made a mark with his blue pencil, and then planed away until the wood shrieked. From the plane flew long silkily gleaming strips which rolled themselves into curls and here and there gave out a resinous reddish gleam in the sunlight.

A girl entered, laid bread on the table, and went away again. Work ceased ; father and son sat down to eat and offered

A Childhood

me too a place. The old man cut off a slice, one for himself, one for me, one for his son. Encouraged by such hospitality, I asked Reisinger what was to happen to the boards which he had just planed and polished. He explained that they were to be used to make caskets, pointed to the corner, where already stood a pile of caskets and boxes, all of them still without paint or ornamentation, and called his father to witness that he had finished three of them himself. Then he described how later they were to be stained or varnished and furnished with clasps and locks.

From time to time I involuntarily examined my former enemy. Talking there so quietly and objectively he was truly a changed being. He seemed to me to have suffered a little from his stroke, he stuttered slightly in speaking ; but what he said was clear and seriously meant, and I could gaze at his face as much as I liked now without feeling in the least daunted. The irregular features

The Offering

were the same as ever ; but like a musical theme to which one had prefixed a different key, they signified something else. "The dead hand has transformed him," the childish thought flew through my head, but I banished it to the dream-world where it belonged. For now I did not feel in the least inclined to dream. Every plane-shaving in the bare room called to activity, and I said boldly that I too would give anything to learn how to make pretty caskets, whereupon with a harsh laugh the old master-joiner responded : "Come as often as you like ! We'll soon break you in !" But the son fell silent and gloomily looked away. The father's excessive mark of favour may have seemed far too lightly earned to the boy proud of his work. At last he got up, opened a drawer, took out a yellowish sheet of paper, and spread it out before me.

"Before you handle wood and saw you must be able to draw," he began severely.

"Here is a sheet of paper. There are

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lines drawn on it, angles, triangles, squares, cubes. Now you copy them all out at home, one after the other, exactly as they are, and in free hand ; mind that. You mustn't make things easy for yourself by using a ruler or tracing paper ; none of that ! When you've done that, come again and show it to me."

The old man laughed. " You're hard on him," he said.

Meanwhile I was remembering those dreadful moments in the school when desperate fury had awakened in me something almost like a talent, and my hated enemy had suddenly appeared on the slate,—now he was posing as my teacher, and my resistance was aroused, but almost immediately it died of itself, and finally I could only hope that I might be as lucky now with angle and square as I had been with that hostile face.

" If you keep at it," he went on in a friendly enough voice, " we'll be able to start on the real joinering before Easter ! "

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With that he stuck the folded sheets into my overcoat pocket. It was time to go : I thanked father and son and took my leave.

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In the priest's house a few more experiences awaited me. I missed the reverend father's room and found myself instead in a little half-darkened private chapel which I left hastily again, it is true, but only after I had looked round me for a little, which I did somewhat fearfully. A praying-stool stood before the pointed altar ; but on the altar itself I discerned between two silver kneeling angels a glass case in which lay on dark violet velvet a bony arm set with precious stones, which fearfully reminded me of the other dead arm, that hateful arm which since my onset on Reisinger I had never seen again. True, everything did not correspond ; shoulder-blade, muscles, and sinews were wanting here, but the hand was about the

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same size ; and in any case it was definitely a human arm. There was no time for further comparison, and as soon as my eyes were no longer fixed on the apparition, my fancy began softly to efface the differences. I resolved nevertheless to examine the whole thing more carefully on my way back.

The sacristan led me to the upper storey, where I was to await the priest. In the middle of the room stood a broad table with black writing materials ; the walls were unpapered and but sparsely decorated. Over a low book-case hung a crucifix ; by the door was a silver vessel with holy water ; passion flower shoots were putting forth green on the three window-sills. A picture was pinned to the wall between two of the windows, and I went forward to look at it. It represented a building which was unlike any known to me ; but my mind approved of it ardently and at once. I saw a great number of bright steps, and rising from them tall and

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beautiful columns on which rested a broad based triangle with figures inset. What delighted me most of all was that the structure did not close one in or conceal anything, but that on the contrary from between the pillars one could glimpse tree-tops, towers, and birds flying in the air. It was further lightened by three lofty portals through which people came and went, while others who seemed to be resting or waiting sat on the magnificent flight of steps.

Footsteps rang behind me ; the priest had entered. He took my hand and told me to seat myself at the huge table. Never before had I seen such a slim and elegant old man. His face was brownish, but his forehead was pale, and his eyes in their arched sockets were sleepily half-closed one moment, and wide open the next, as if they were gazing into a vast distance. He told me that we would not begin with our studies that day, asked me this and that, decided the hours at which I should

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attend in future, and arranged for me to come next day. I was unable to pass the wonderful drawing without giving it a glance.

"The propylæum has caught your eye, it seems," said the priest.

"What does that mean : propylæum ?" I asked.

"The propylæum," he replied, "is a pillared gate like many that the ancient Greeks built." Thereupon he unpinned the drawing, wiped the dust from it, and laid it on the table so that both of us might look at it. After he had said several things hard to understand about pillars, friezes, and sculptures, I longed to know what purpose such gates had been built for.

"The gate, magnificent as it looks there, was not the most important thing," ran his explanation, "it was only the entrance. Whoever went through reached the consecrated ground on which the temple was built. And in it stood the image of the god."

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“ My mother says that the Greeks were heathens,” I ventured to throw in.

“ Yes, they were heathens.”

“ Then didn’t they disbelieve in God ? ”

“ They made gods for themselves and fell together with their gods.”

“ Did they all die together ? ”

“ I did not mean it in that sense,” replied the priest smilingly. “ The Greeks went on living, and their successors are still living in Greece to-day. But the power of God through which they fashioned such beautiful buildings only remained in them for a little time. That was more than two thousand years ago, and our beloved Lord Jesus was not yet born then.”

This did not give me much light, and I turned again to the drawing itself. “ Yes, the gods pass away, but God lives ! ” cried the priest, wandering about the room. “ And the Grecian artist who built this gate : do you think that he was not a man of God ? ”

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"Then will he be admitted into Heaven?" I asked quickly.

"Who will be admitted into Heaven is not for us to decide," he replied slowly. "But if you get there yourself you will find gates like this one here."

"You can see here," I said, "all kinds of people going through the propylæum, gentlemen with cigars, ladies with parasols, children with doll carts—are they all Greeks?"

"No," replied the priest, "they are people of to-day like you and me."

"Then are there gates like this anywhere still?"

"One or two. Clever artists have made exact imitations of the few old buildings that are still hanging together, and built them anew in their own countries. The one you see here is not very far away. It stands in the middle of our chief town, Munich. One day your road will be sure to lead you there."

"Will I be allowed to go through it?"

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“ I should hope so.”

“ Why do the people in the drawing never even look at the gate, and go through as if it didn't matter ? Don't they know that it's a sacred gate ? ”

“ Perhaps they do not know it,” said the priest. “ But you know it now. Remember that when you stand before it ! And now don't ask any more questions, but run away home. From to-morrow you'll start to learn.”

My head felt dazed and clear at the same time as I left the priest's house. It was one of those days when a warm wind fans the last streaks of snow, and beneath torn, black, smouldering clouds the wild geese wing past giving their distant cry. In the middle of the market-place I remembered that I had forgotten to have another look at the dead arm, but I told myself immediately that it was no longer necessary. Fantasy had completed its work ; the unblessed, outcast arm in the rubbish chest and the piously decorated

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one in the glass casket had already become identical, and I knew that thenceforth I would always think of the one as the other. This was a great new resource ; I decided to make a mystery of it, even to myself, and not to investigate the reality any further.

I had no desire to go straight home, however, especially as Master Joiner Reisinger's excellent home-made bread had taken away my midday hunger ; so I hurried from the market-place and the streets into the country and strolled for a while along the stream in the direction of Landau. The fertile meadows and corn-fields suddenly ended here in a stretch of moorland where only willows prospered, and these were a needy race which hardly ever brought forth a lofty trunk with a wide-spreading crown ; for the most part I saw short stumps which near the ground broke into blunt club-like branches, and exhausted themselves in countless shoots. One long and slender trunk, however,

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stretched its strangely contorted shape from the still frozen bank towards the footpath ; I knew it from former strolls here, and it had always given the spot a gruesome fascination for me. Long since stripped of its bark and bleached to a gleaming grey, it ran out into a clearly defined thickening, which made it resemble with wonderful exactitude the neck and head of a snake ready to strike. Besides, it was hollow, and the open jaws seemed to lead down to a great depth. I searched in all my pockets without thinking, but filled with a vague emotion to which perhaps I wished to give expression by what I did next ; for I pulled out a few crystallised almonds and nuts which I had been given to eat on my way, and stuck them into the monster's gullet. A little ring with glass rubies, which I wore on my finger—it was a present from Eva—I sent after the sweets. But the voracious jaws still remained wide open, and as I had nothing more of my own, I searched all

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round for new material to dispense. Amid a tangle of shrubs I spied a wild rose bush covered with little red hips which were still cased in ice ; I plucked at these until my hands burned, and fed them to the mighty serpent. Then I left the place with a dream-like resolve never to return again, and walked quickly back to Kading. Before I reached the first houses I looked round once more and noticed that a few magpies were flying and screaming round the place ; one of them was actually perched on the serpent-head and seemed to be busily pecking into the jaws ; at which a feeling of boundless joy descended on me. I did not know why.

THE END

FOUR NEW TITLES

FOR SPRING 1933

68. THE RESCUE

By JOSEPH CONRAD

"Scenes of the sea and of the land, portraits of savage chiefs and of English sailors, such as no one else can paint."
TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT. "One of the amplest and most wonderful of Conrad's romances." E. B. OSBORN in the MORNING POST.

69. MARCHING SPAIN

By V. S. PRITCHETT

A "personal adventure" in Spain, vigorously and vividly painted by a man whose imaginative insight and joy in his material was the first quality to be praised by the critics. "The authors of 'The Path to Rome' and 'The Bible in Spain' will gladly make a place for Mr. Pritchett at their table in the *posada*." LIFE AND LETTERS.

70. STUDIES IN CLASSIC AMERICAN LITERATURE

By D. H. LAWRENCE

A book which is more than a study of Poe, Hawthorne, Melville, Whitman and the other classic writers. It makes a definite contribution to Lawrence's philosophy, and, in particular, is indispensable as a companion to "Fantasia of the Unconscious." Originally published in 1924, this is the first cheap edition.

71. A CHILDHOOD

By HANS CAROSSA

A little classic, which on its first English publication secured the recommendation of the Book Society and the plaudits of the critics. "I have read no such imaginative reconstruction of childhood since Aksakov's 'Years of Childhood.'" FRANK SWINFERTON in the EVENING NEWS.

EIGHT NEW TITLES

FOR AUTUMN 1932

60. NOSTROMO

By JOSEPH CONRAD

The first cheap edition of Conrad's longest novel, and the one which he himself considered his best. "Wealth of every sort pours its avalanche from different tributaries into his pages. It would be difficult to find half a dozen thin, colourless, or perfunctory sentences in the length of the book." THE TIMES.

61. A TRAVELLER IN LITTLE THINGS

By W. H. HUDSON

One of Hudson's most characteristic collections of country sketches. "All pure Hudson, full of his deep and quiet insight, of his equally deep and quiet humour, and of his delicate and moving fancy." BOOKMAN. "No man, I think, has ever realised Nature emotionally so completely as Hudson, and no writer has been so able to pass on to others that emotional realisation." JOHN GALSWORTHY.

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63. EXTRAORDINARY WOMEN

By COMPTON MACKENZIE

A new edition uniform with the author's other novels already contained in the library, "Carnival" (No. 37), "Guy and Pauline" (No. 36), and "The Passionate Elopement" (No. 35). "His picture is sufficiently gay, light-hearted and impudent to deserve that relaxation of criticism which Charles Lamb claimed for certain artificial comedies." SATURDAY REVIEW.

64. THE REBEL GENERATION

By JO VAN AMMERS-KULLER

Translated from the Dutch by M. W. Hoper. "This is a poignant study of three generations of women—the repressed, the emancipating, and the emancipated. That is its formal outline: but that brief summary does little justice to the power, insight, and deep and passionate sympathy with which the women (and men) are depicted. . . . 'The Rebel Generation' is a big and wise book, not to be missed." MARY AGNES HAMILTON (Broadcasting).

65. BLINDNESS

By HENRY GREEN

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By PHOEBE FENWICK GAYE

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By FRANK SWINNERTON

A volume of essays by this distinguished novelist. "He amounts to a tonic." ARNOLD BENNETT in the EVENING STANDARD. "As pleasant as the country cottage in which they were written." NORTHERN ECHO.

FULL LIST OF TITLES

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"A brilliant travel-book. . . . Mr. Douglas is a traveller to be read and treasured." *DAILY NEWS*.
2. FAR OFF THINGS
By ARTHUR MACHEN
"Again and again it catches the breath of the reader with that delicious emotion that is half pain for the thing told, half joy in the perfection of the telling." *COUNTRY LIFE*. A literary autobiography completed in "Things Near and Far" (No. 8).
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Mr. Chesterton's first and most successful venture in the dramatic form, and a work which no admirer of his can afford to overlook.
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8. THINGS NEAR AND FAR
By ARTHUR MACHEN
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preparation*

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